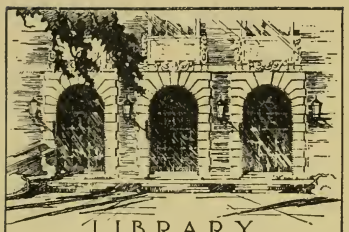

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THE MASTER OF WINGBOURNE.

A NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:
T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.
1866.

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THE MASTER OF WINGBOURNE.

CHAPTER I.

DIARY OF ANTONY WYVIL, ESQ.

JULY 15th, 1830.—I sit down to write this diary, dearest sister, not that I have the remotest idea that after the first page or two, even your kindly criticism will find its record of unvarnished facts, and conversations, other than uninteresting, but because I promised you I would let you know all I was concerned in; and all promises become sacred when made during a time of affliction, as ours was. I am afraid I shall have nothing

worth reading to insert. If you did not know England so well, or if I were a stranger here, I might describe to you the varied impressions which the sight of the mother country is apt to produce upon her colonial-born children; but as we both have spent the happiest years of our lives here,—you, till Edward carried you off to India with him; and I, till within the last two years; and as, moreover, we have since gone over together all those sweet school and holiday recollections and impressions, I can have nothing more to say on that score.

Our voyage has been prosperous; but of that you will have been already apprised in the letter I sent you by the outward-bound ship we met near St. Helena. I am now writing in the hotel at Southampton, where I intend to remain two or three days, before proceeding to Mr. Carslope's seat of Wingbourne.

Six months ago, how little idea I had that by July I should be once more in Eng-

land, having left its shores so recently. I had prepared myself, as you well know, for a long course of vigorous, useful life, such as my father's had been, hoping to work (for many years at least) under his eye, with you and Edward settled not far from us, and many another friend near. I had given myself my father's benovelent and honourable career as a model, and all my English studies had had my Indian life in view. This was my expectation; his death in that sharp sudden attack of fever destroyed a portion of my hopes; and his last breathed desire that I should abandon India, and return home to England for ever, finished that chapter of my life.

What his motives were I have no idea. He may have feared that the climate of the country, which had so completely shattered his once vigorous constitution, might undermine mine. He may have thought there was a greater reputation to be made by being called to the Bar in England, than in the

service of John Company. He may have wished me not to spend my life as he had passed his own, an alien from the mother country; but surely, if so, it was late to come to this conviction, when my education was finished, my examinations passed, and my career already commenced. Whatever his reasons were, I had not time to ask him for them, in the paroxysms of that fierce fever; but his wish, so emphatically expressed, must remain a law to me, and in obedience to it, I left you all, and am here.

So long as I remain ignorant of my poor father's real motives, I cannot but regard the exchange as an evil. The one year I had already spent in India had given me an employment quite sufficient for my capacities—had united me to friends whom I had remembered in my childhood, and whom, during the long exile of my school life I had longed to see again, and above all, had restored me to you, dearest Alice. You had finished your school life in England, and

married, and gone back to India so long before, that to meet you was, I think, the greatest pleasure I found on arriving there; and your house, Edward's society, and the sight of your children, had supplied me with all the home feeling that a life spent between school, and holidays at our poor old uncle bachelor's house, necessarily lacked. Moreover, I felt at home in the country and with its life. Here I have several years of hard reading before me, before I can even stand on the threshold of the profession my father has indicated to me, and even when I am qualified to don the gown, I have but little chance, without friends or powerful relations, to raise myself by my own unassisted exertions to any pre-eminence. All the influence that our family has ever acquired, centres in India. Here, I have no friends to equal in value those I have left behind me in Bombay; indeed, I may say I have none at all. My school companions must be by this time scattered, many of them being in India, and

I shall have much difficulty in tracing the others. And our poor uncle, at whose house we used to stay during our holidays, being dead, I have, under these circumstances, very little to tempt me in England.

You will say I am ungrateful to the gifts of Providence; that most young fellows of twenty-one, with the world before them, and a competence,—though a modest one, still a competence,—already provided for them, should have no room to complain—that if I am so unfortunate as to have lost all my friends, I can make fresh ones, and that you and Edward for your parts would only be too happy to return, in any manner, to our dear mother country. Be it so; perhaps I am ungrateful; but I would gladly exchange with you. I pine more than I can express for my Indian life—for the morning scamper across the open jungle—the luxury of that bath afterwards—the delicious coolness of the evening, the days of field sports, the tiger hunting—nay, even the daily task of writing

becomes dear to me, in comparison with the drudgery I must expect here; and if I could have my wish, without direct disobedience to my father's desire, and could transport myself back to you all again, the prospect of another weary four months of sea life round the Cape should not deter me.

Having complied with my father's wishes in such essentials, I shall, of course, obey him in all minor points, and make my first visit to his old friend, Mr. Carslope, who lives at his estate called Wingbourne, situate somewhere on the confines of North Wales. I must look in the map till I find it. My father knew him, it seems, when they were both young men together, before he left England for India; and they have occasionally corresponded since, but I do not think Mr. Carslope can have enjoyed any great amount of his friendship—I ought perhaps to say his esteem—since, in the ten long years that I passed in school, I never once received an invitation to go to visit him, nor even heard of his existence;

and you were in equal ignorance. I have to-day arrived at what I think is a clue to this reticence on our dear father's part, though why he should at last have desired me to go to pay this visit, when I have no longer the benefit of his advice to guide me, I cannot guess. However, I hope, that at my age, my principles are sufficiently firm to stand any test which may be applied to them at Wingbourne.

I have filled this sheet entirely with my own personality, Alice, but such is the inevitable result of asking even the most lively-minded individual, which I am not, to write a diary when he has nothing to say. I cannot promise that mine will at any time be more interesting. If you care to hear of my progress through Blackstone and Coke upon Littleton, you may be gratified, but if you expect any more exciting occupations or adventures, I warn you, you will be disappointed. Nature did not cut me out for a hero ; I have never had a single exciting ad-

venture, though I have been three times round the Cape, once home, when a boy, then outward, "to utmost India bound," and since then home again; I have never been in a storm; I have never shot an albatross, nor has any one ever fallen overboard, to give opportunity for the display of my heroic qualities by plunging into the sea after them. And in that unlucky tiger hunt, when our party came to so much damage, it was Edward's elephant after all, and not mine, that the brute fastenened his claws into. One thing I can promise you, and that is that this diary, if not regularly, shall be, at least, faithfully kept. I will nothing extenuate or aught set down in malice, and if the people and things I come across are uninteresting, I will not distort the truth in endeavouring to make them less so. If one cannot have the privilege of writing egotistical letters to an only sister, I do not know when we can.

I told you I believe I have discovered the

reason why Wingbourne might, in my younger days, be considered an undesirable residence for me. It happened in this wise.

In the coffee-room this morning, I questioned the waiter, who brought me my breakfast, upon the different routes for going northward, and the best way of travelling. A gentleman who was sitting at the next table heard me casually mention the name of Wingbourne, and when the waiter had departed, he asked me civilly whether I was acquainted with Mr. Carslope, the proprietor. I told him I was not, and little by little related to him my reasons for going to see him. I told him Mr. Carslope had been the former friend of my father, at whose wish I had returned from India, and was paying my first visit to him, before even going to London. I had written to him to tell him of this visit by the last vessel which had left India before I had started, and I begged him if he knew anything about Mr. Carslope, to let me know what it was, if he could do so with con-

venience to himself, as the whole family were complete strangers to me.

My new acquaintance is a lawyer, the elder partner in a solicitor's firm in London, a sensible, gentlemanly man, and one who may prove a good friend to me on my first essay of London life. He was about to travel, he told me, with his wife and family in Wales for some months, their head quarters to be fixed at Caernarvon, and he invited me, in case I should be travelling that way, to call in upon them.

Mr. Crowe, such was the lawyer's name, told me all he knew concerning the Carslope family—that all is but little, and chiefly relating to the estate. They were acquainted, he told me, for a year or two, when he happened to be living in that part of the country. Mr. Carslope, he said, came into possession of the estate in right of his wife, having but little fortune of his own, and giving up his chances in a profession to settle down as a country gentleman.

Miss Ellerslie (the maiden name of his wife) had a sister equally well off with herself, but the property had been divided, the landed estate coming to the eldest, and a large sum of money to the younger sister. This latter married a vulgar, dissipated man, who soon broke her heart, wasted her fortune, and indirectly caused her death, leaving one son, who was brought up partly under the care of Mr. Carslope, his mother's brother-in-law, partly under that of his own father. The eldest sister, Mrs. Carslope, died not long afterwards, leaving her husband in the life enjoyment of the Wingbourne estate, to be inherited after his death by their only child, a daughter.

"And in default of Miss Carslope, her cousin is, I suppose, the next heir?"

"Precisely so, and if he were dead it would devolve upon some third or fourth cousin," said Mr. Crowe. "It is a long time since I heard anything direct from the family, but report does not speak very favourably of the

young man, the nephew. It is a wildish sort of country, and they live much sequestered, and he has had every disadvantage so long as his own father lived, amongst his dissipated associates. They say that Mr. Carslope keeps no society at all, which is a pity, for men very soon get out of the ways of the world by living much alone."

"Mr. Carslope, however, is a gentleman himself, is he not?" I said, interested in the reputation of a man who had once been my father's friend.

"He was, when I knew him," replied Mr. Crowe. "I do not know what he may be now. Living in retirement, a person is very apt to degenerate, as I said before. However, I believe you will find him pleasant and hospitable, and should you not care to stay long at Wingbourne, remember, Mr. Wyvil, we shall be very happy to meet you at Caernarvon."

I thanked him, and we separated; I, on my side, revolving deeply his information. If,

as he says, the young man, Mr. Carslope's nephew, has been so ill-educated, and is so vicious and dissipated, it may well explain my father's reluctance to send me there. I trust, as I said before, I am sufficiently well-principled to run no danger, but is that security the only reason why my father has permittted,or rather enjoined my visit there at the present time? What think you, Alice?

Whether Mr. Carslope turns out to be a gentleman or not, I am not likely to meet with many attractions in a remote Welsh village, and my stay at Wingbourne will probably be but of short duration. I have not yet decided if I shall accept Mr. Crowe's invitation, but as I think it most probable that I shall spend the rest of the summer in travelling, before I settle down in London for hard reading, I may as well take that part of Wales in my way as any other place.

CHAPTER II.

THE MASTER OF WINGBOURNE.

JULY 19TH.—To-day I arrived at Wingbourne, and although now late, I willingly devote an hour of the already half-elapsed night to record my first impressions, so that you may have them at least fresh and genuine. The coach set me down, weary and stiff with long riding, at the insignificant ale-house of a small, mean-looking village, where the few loungers who were leaning round the door, enjoying a pipe of refresh-

ment after the day's work, for it was then six o'clock, had ample entertainment for their Bœotian minds, in the unwonted sight of a traveller stopping there. I inquired whether I could procure any conveyance to Wingbourne, but this was beyond the power of the landlord to furnish.

"The hosses were out in the hay field," he said, "and it wasn't more than three miles over the fields to Wingbourne, if I did not miss the right path."

Mr. Carslope had sent no carriage for me; I hardly expected it, for I could not be sure that he had received my last letter, telling him the exact day of my arrival, so consigning my luggage to the landlord's care, till I could send for it, and taking minute instructions about the path, I set off on my walk across the fields.

The sun was low by the time I arrived in sight of the house, or rather houses, for Wingbourne resembles more a collection of buildings than one solid mass. The central edifice,

so far as it was left still visible, is a grey stone building of more pretension than the generality of farmhouses, but neither in size or finish equal to a gentleman's mansion. The red-tiled roof and the walls were already mellowed with orange and yellow lichens, which attested its greater antiquity than the other structures which had been added on to it. These buildings are of every conceivable shape and size—though the same material, the grey stone, being employed on all, prevents their looking so heterogeneous as they must otherwise appear. They seem to have been added on at no one time, and by various architects ; odd corners and angles protrude on all sides, utterly marring all attempt at symmetry, and chimneys are stuck on, and windows broken out through the walls, in bold defiance of any system of architecture.

The surroundings of the house are equally ill-arranged. A confused number of buildings, stables, cow-houses, piggeries, and barns, are set down here and there with ap-

parently no plan but that of studied irregularity, over a space of one to two acres—the whole enclosure being surrounded by a low, but strongly built stone wall, further defended on the outside by a deep sunk fence. This latter is crossed in two or three places by raised causeways, communicating with gates in the stone wall. There was one causeway in front of the principal door of the building, which was broad enough to accommodate a carriage, but the others seemed destined solely for the convenience of the cattle in being driven out to the fields, and one at the back of the house led to the gardens which are all planted outside the circumvallation. Only one or two trees have been allowed to remain near the house, which stands out ugly and bare, except for a few climbing plants, even at this, the most beautiful time of the year.

I had ample opportunity to survey the whole of this extraordinary habitation, as it stood in a hollow, the ground sloping down

to it in a semi-circle of hills, and the pathway by which I first approached it ran for some distance along the side of the hill, before descending into the valley, so that I had made half the circuit of the place before I approached its hall-door.

On ringing the great iron bell which hung down by a chain aside of it, the clangour sounded all over the premises like an alarum, and I was half deafened by the chorus of baying howling dogs which it provoked—some within the house, others at various kennels in the yards. The commotion increased with every repetition of the summons, as in spite of the uproar, it was not until the third time of ringing that the servants volunteered to answer the bell. I inquired for Mr. Carslope.

"He is in, sir, but just going to dinner. He never sees anyone except in the morning," was the answer.

"Does he not expect me, Mr. Wyvil? I have but just arrived from Southampton."

The man looked doubtful.

"I'll go and see, sir," he said. "Mr. Carslope does not generally do business except in the morning," and with that he departed, leaving me standing beneath a huge and clumsily shaped stone portico, ornamented (it could not be improved) by two or three long sprays of jessamine climbing up it.

After a delay of about five minutes, he returned, accompanied by an elderly, grey-haired man, who wore no livery, but whom, nevertheless, I judged to be an upper servant or steward.

"Are you the gentleman, sir, who was expected from India—coming to bide here?" he asked, in a strong Scotch accent.

"Mr. Wyvil, yes, I am he," I answered. "I suppose Mr. Carslope has not received my letter, telling him what day I should arrive."

"It does not matter in the least, sir. Will you walk this way?"

He showed me into a room, and saying,

"I'll let the master ken you are here," left me.

The room in which I waited for the arrival of my father's old friend is a long, low-ceilinged apartment, with small lattice windows, in heavy stone framings. Dark oaken panellings covered the walls to half their height, the remainder of which were painted of a pinkish white. The sides of the room were loaded with pictures of very little taste or execution; a few tolerable engravings of the royal family, coronation scenes, and so forth, and the remainder, portraits of celebrated racers, and doubtful landscapes that might have been picked up at any second-hand dealer in daubs in London. The furniture of the room was worthy of the pictures. The spindle legged tables and straight backed chairs were neither sufficiently old to command respect for their antiquity, nor new enough to give an air of comfort and habitableness to the room. The window curtains were cumbrous, and the cornices and frames of the pictures heavily

gilt and far too large for the height of the room. A few impossible Chinese monsters, fantastically grinning, completed the incongruous adornments of the room; and a total absence of books on either centre or side tables showed that if this were the common sitting-room of the family, as from various slight disarrangements of the furniture it appeared to be, I should not find in them very intellectual companions.

I had but just finished my observations when the entrance of Mr. Carslope claimed my attention. In his youth, he must have been, I fancy, handsome, and he is still tall and rather striking in appearance. He looks considerably older than his real age which is not more than fifty, and his brown hair is plentifully sprinkled with white. He stoops slightly, and there is an appearance of ill-health about him which is not dispelled by his voice, which, though hearty and cheerful, has no ring of health it it. He was dressed in a most scrupulously observant dinner

dress; but yet his manner and conversation are not strictly those of a gentleman, though I should be at a loss at present to define in what he fails.

I have reason to be grateful to him for the warmth of his welcome to me. Indeed, after receiving the first cordial pressure of his hand. I could hardly realise myself to be a stranger, who, till that day, had never seen him, and who, before the last year, had scarcely heard the sound of his name.

"Better late than never, Mr. Wyvil—Mr. Antony Wyvil, you must allow me to call you—I cannot so soon forget my old friend who would, if he had lived, have been my contemporary, and, indeed, you are very like your poor father when I last saw him. I went down to Southampton to see him off, little thinking I should never set my eyes on him again. That was nearly thirty years ago. The ship he sailed in was the Malabar—I remember it as well as if it was yesterday. But as I was saying, you are very welcome,

though you have come later than you were expected. I have been looking out for your vessel for the last two months, though Flo' told me it could not have got round the Cape by that time."

"Our vessel was detained by contrary winds," I said; "but it is at all times a lengthy voyage. I know it tolerably well by this time, for it is the third passage I have made. You know I first came to England when but a child."

"Very true; all the greater pity your father did not send you to me then. But why do I stand talking here when dinner is being set on the table already? Can you be ready in five minutes, Mr. Antony? If not, you know the things will spoil."

I begged to be shown a room, and promised to use my very best speed; but though I removed the dust of the journey from my dress as expeditiously as possible, the dinner bell had sounded, jarring and clanging through the house as though it had been a tocsin, be-

fore I was ready, and when I hurried downstairs, and was shown the way to the dining-room, I found my host, and another gentleman already waiting there.

"Let me make you acquainted," said Mr. Carslope. "My nephew, or rather, I should say, my wife's nephew, Mr. Godfrey Thurston. Mr. Antony Wyvil, the son of a dear friend of mine. I trust you will be very good friends. Pray let us sit down; the soup is growing cold. Mr. Antony, I hope you are not particular about grace; we always have it whenever the clergyman dines here."

He turned round and surveyed the table. It was set for four persons, and something seemed suddenly to strike him as wrong, for he asked sharply of the old majordomo who stood by the sideboard,

"Where is Flo'? where is Miss Carslope?"

"I will go and inquire, sir," said the man, and he left the room.

"Ay, do," said his master, "and meanwhile, gentlemen, let us sit down to table. There is

no use in letting good things spoil. Mr. Antony, will you take the place at my right hand?"

I obeyed in silence, and Godfrey Thurston took his seat opposite to me. Mr. Crowe had prepared me not to expect a gentleman of the most finished type, yet I could not recover from my astonishment at hearing such a clownish common-place individual addressed as Mr. Carslope's nephew, and living on terms of intimacy with his family. He was a well-made man enough, and not without a certain air of heavy comeliness, but his face and demeanour were in no way superior to any of the rustics I had seen lounging and smoking at the village inn. Had I met him in a different dress or in any other society, I should have passed him by as a doubtless honest, but in no way interesting young ploughman. He looked about twenty years of age, his eyes and hair were dark, and his face full and ruddy, and his mouth, though large, was filled with white, even teeth. His expression,

if his face could be said to have any expression, was that of content, and stolid good-humour. Of his speech I could learn nothing; he had not yet opened his lips, only acknowledging my presence by an awkward bow upon his uncle's introduction, and a heavy stare, and then his attention seemed wholly engrossed by the viands on the table.

The old majordomo returned in a few minutes, giving entrance as he did so to a whole troop of dogs, who followed at his heels, and placed themselves by the table as privileged intruders.

"Miss Carslope," he said, "has not come back from her ride," and he prepared to remove his master's plate, with so much composure, that I conjectured the non-appearance of the young lady to be an every-day occurrence.

"Not come back yet?" said Mr. Carslope. "Has she gone far? Godfrey, do you know which way she was riding?"

"Towards the North Hill, and round by

Rhysdale fishponds, she told me," answered his nephew, in a tone and accent which did not belie his appearance: both were completely boorish.

"And on what horse? Not the knock-kneed brute, Mervyn?" rejoined Mr. Carslope.

"No, her bay mare, Meg," was the reply, and the subject was dropped by both gentlemen, though Mr. Carslope continued to wear for the next five minutes an air of annoyance, as though his daughter's unpunctuality at table had disturbed him. Mr. Godfrey Thurston, on the contrary, gave himself up without reservation to the enjoyment of the excellent trout which was now brought on, and seemed to regard everything else as a matter of indifference.

Nevertheless, when his hunger was somewhat appeased, I saw him two or three times glancing wistfully at the empty chair which was still set at the bottom of the table, as if he missed its usual occupant; there was a huge dog, half mastiff and half bloodhound,

mounting guard beside it, and in the absence of his mistress he did not disdain to apply to Mr. Godfrey for occasional supplies. On such occasions his low whimper of solicitation was at once attended to, though the other puppies, whelps, and hounds received nothing at his hands. They besieged Mr. Carslope at the head of the table, and as each in turn became the most importunate, were severally turned out by the servants, not however with much effect, as they one and all contrived to squeeze themselves in again, between the footman's legs at the next opening of the door.

The dinner was a long and—considering that it had been provided for the family alone, without any expectation of a guest—a sumptuous one. I readily conceived that in the vacancy and tedium of the country life, it formed the principal event of Mr. Carslope's day. The appointments of the table were, like the rest of the house, ill in keeping with each other. A fine old dinner service of

china had been supplemented, and its vacancies supplied by common crockery, such as any country shop could furnish ; the glasses on the table were coarse and common, but on the other hand the linen though old was fine, and several handsome pieces of plate that stood on the sideboard attested that the disproportion in all things did not arise from want of money ; the plate was engraved with a coat of arms and a cipher, not that, as Mr. Carslope took the opportunity of assuring me, of his own family, but belonging to the former possessor of Wingbourne, his wife's father.

Our meal as I have said was lengthy, and was further prolonged by wine, but it ended as it had begun, without the presence of Miss Carslope. Such conversation as there was, was carried on solely by her father and myself, relating chiefly to my journey, and the situation of my affairs when I quitted India. Mr. Godfrey Thurston never opened his lips, unless when directly appealed to by his uncle,

when some fresh dish or newly uncorked bottle of wine challenged his attention. He drank steadily and deeply, and in this particular his uncle was not far behind him, but being seasoned topers the wine appeared to produce but little effect on either.

The great clock in the hall tolled out nine before we left the table.

"You are no great drinker, I see, Mr. Antony," said Mr. Carslope to me. "Well, it is quite as well that a young man should not be, though Godfrey here and I can empty a bottle with any man; but at your age I was more abstemious. Stay and try my port; I've had it in bottle myself these nineteen years. I laid it in the year Flo' was born, in her honour, and she will not be twenty till next September. What! you will not? then we'll go into the drawing-room and have a quiet pipe—you smoke, I suppose?"

I did not, but I declared myself ready to accompany him.

"And we will have a game of backgammon

—you play it, I hope? Flo' is my usual antagonist. Godfrey, what do you say to the bottle of port?" he added, as we were leaving the room, observing that the young rustic had never stirred from his chair, but was engaged in pouring himself out another bumper.

"A good notion. If it is taken into the drawing-room, I'll follow," said the heavy Godfrey, and we adjourned forthwith to the room, where I had been first shown.

Here Mr. Carslope and the young cub, his nephew, threw themselves into two easy chairs on each side of the fire,—the elder gentleman requesting me to be seated likewise,—and commenced stuffing and lighting their pipes, varied after half an hour's fumigation by a cigar on the part of the younger man. The large mastiff had accompanied us, and now with paws stretched out across the hearthrug and head between them, lay beside Godfrey's chair in silent contemplation of the bright fire, which, though it was a July evening, seemed to make the large room none

too warm. To my mind the dog looked the most intellectual of the two.

Meanwhile Mr. Carslope again proposed backgammon.

"You'll see the board on the table between the windows, if you will have the kindness to bring it here," he said. "That chair will be too low for you, will it not? It is where Flo' usually sits when she plays."

We played game after game—for Mr. Carslope seemed to derive great satisfaction from the amusement—while Godfrey continued to smoke and stare at the fire in absolute idleness, and the mastiff lay winking and blinking his great honest eyes aside of him. Eleven o'clock struck at last.

"That's about enough for one evening, I think," said Mr. Carslope, cheerily (I had long been of the same opinion). "We'll leave off now and have supper. Godfrey, will you ring ?"

"We do not see Miss Carslope at all to-

night, I suppose," said I, while the young cub stirred neither hand nor foot towards the bell.

"No, we shut up at eleven as often as not," was Mr. Carslope's nonchalant response, and I ventured again to say,

"Miss Carslope, has I suppose, returned home long ago."

"Why, yes; most likely," said her father, puffing away at his freshly filled pipe. "Most likely gone to bed tired. Godfrey! bless the lad, he's asleep. Mr. Antony, will you be so good as to ring the bell?"

The old majordom appeared.

"We'll have supper, Nichols. Are the gates locked yet? you ought to mind to have the keys by this time—I'll have no more robbing of the hen-roosts after dark."

"Weel, sir, certainly; I'll lock them at once; but you'll no be aware perhaps that Miss Florence is still abroad."

"Flo' still abroad?" repeated her father.

"Deuce take the girl! what does she mean by staying out so late as this? What sort of a night is it, Nichols?"

"I ken na, sir; but there is no moon, I believe, and it has come on to rain a little."

"Open the shutter and look out, Nichols," said his master, and Nichols obeyed, while I stared in speechless amazement at the nonchalance of the easy-going parent.

"It is as I said, sir," continued the major-dom. "It drizzles a little—not over much, but it's cloudy and pitch-dark. I fear Miss Florence must have lost her road."

"Miss Carslope has of course a servant with her," I observed, seeing that her father made no reply of any kind.

"No, no, Flo' can't abide a servant to follow her," he said. "What are we to do now?" he added, uneasily rising from his chair, and joining the old steward at the window. "It's drizzling, sure enough, and the child must have lost her way."

"Or fallen from her horse," suggested

Nichols. "That Meg was aye an unchancy beast, though Miss Florence is so set upon her."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "You will surely send out to look for her, sir. I will set off at once, and Mr. Thurston and the servants."

"I don't see what good that will do," said Mr. Carslope, despondently. "We do not know which way she has gone, or how far. Godfrey! my lad, wake up! It's past eleven o'clock, and Flo' has not yet come home, and she's out on Meg, and the night is so dark she can't see a yard before her."

His uncle's voice, or more probably the draught of fresh air from the opened window into the smoky atmosphere of the room, awakened the cub from his slumbers.

"What is it?" he said, slowly lifting his head. "Flo' not come home?"

"No, and its past eleven o'clock," said his uncle, "and drizzling fast. What is to be done? She may have lost her way or she

may have met with an accident, and Nichols very properly says he cannot lock the gates till she comes back. I don't know which way she has gone, either."

"She went round by the North Hill, and it's bad riding amongst those rocks, and the lanes coming home are full of holes. I'll go and look for her this minute," exclaimed young Godfrey, with far more vivacity than I had thought him capable of showing. He gave himself a violent shake like a Newfoundland dog, which seemed effectually to banish all remnant of sleepiness, poured out and drank a tumbler full of the vaunted port, and repeated, "I'll go and look for her this minute—poor Flo'!"

"And I'll go with you too," I said.

"Yes, yes, that will be the best thing," said Mr. Carslope, and as if the effort of thinking had fatigued him, he sat down again, almost as contentedly as though his daughter were already safe at home. "You always judge for the best, Godfrey. You and Mr. Wyvil

shall go and see where she is: and Nichols! tell the maids to light a fire in her bedroom, for it's drizzling, and she may have got wet through."

The young cub meanwhile had endued a shaggy great coat that had been carelessly thrown on a chair in the corner of the drawing-room, and which, when drawn on, gave him much the appearance of a walking bear; and giving me the second stare with which he had honoured me that evening, he said, "Come, I'm ready. We must go up the Black Lane. It would be her shortest way home."

Almost as much surprised by his promptitude, as by Mr. Carslope's culpable supineness, I seized up my hat and followed him. But by the time we were half-way to the hall door, the great bell which I had rung so often before obtaining admittance, gave forth a discordant peal, which again roused all the canine echoes of the house, but which, unlike my summons, was promptly answered.

"Be quiet, Syphax!" said Godfrey, patting the large mastiff who had risen from the hearthrug when he rose, and was about to accompany him in the search for his mistress, and who now was adding his deep bay to the sharper tones of the smaller dogs. "It's Flo' herself, may be; no, by Jove, it's a man, d——n him!"

The new comer, thus unceremoniously announced, was a tall man, booted and spurred, and enveloped in a large riding cloak. He entered with the confident step of one well accustomed to the house.

"Is Mr. Carslope in the drawing-room, Godfrey?" he asked, holding out his hand as he spoke, which the young fellow had not the manners to observe.

"Yes, he is there,—where else should he be?" was all he answered, without moving a finger for greeting. The stranger walked on, seemingly used and indifferent to this scant courtesy.

Through the open door of the drawing-

room we could hear him accost our host. "Good evening, Carslope ; you are probably anxious about your daughter. I left her safely at George Clark's, at the Hay Farm."

"Thank you—it is very considerate of you. We were anxious. But the Hay Farm is fourteen miles off. Have you come all the way from there, Cousin Ellerslie?" was Mr. Carslope's rejoinder.

"Why, yes, I thought you would rather know she was safe than not," was the answer, given as I fancied I could detect with a touch of sarcasm which Mr. Carslope's supineness well deserved. "I met her near by the Hay Farm after nightfall ;—her horse had lamed itself—stone in its shoe—and she was not sure about the way. I thought she had better not come on. Clark's wife was all hospitality, and I came on here to let you know all was right. Can you give me a bed to-night?"

"Of course, and some supper too ; we'll have supper at once," said Mr. Carslope, "and Nichols, see you bring the brandy. I'm

always delighted to see you, as you know, Cousin Ellerslie."

"I'd kill that man if I could!" muttered between his teeth young Godfrey, who with me had stood listening to the conversation between his uncle and his new guest.

"Whom do you mean?" I said, startled. "Not this gentleman?"

"Are you listening to other folk's secrets?" he answered, turning round on me savagely, with an oath which I should speedily have resented had not old Nichols, the majordomo, hurried up, and drawing Godfrey's arm within his, forced him away from the hall. In another minute the old man was back by my side.

"Asking your pardon, sir, but will you look over Mr. Godfrey's sayings now and then? He is at times violent, especially, Lord help him! when he has drunk a glass too much. At such times we none of us much mind him. And when Mr. Ellerslie comes he's aye worse. You'll not be going

in for supper perhaps, sir? I can bring you anything you like up to your own room."

I was rather glad to escape seeing them again, for my head was aching; I had drunk more wine than usual with me, at dinner, and the smoky atmosphere of the drawing-room had rather overpowered me. I accepted his offer therefore, and was shown by him to my own room, where he supplied me bounteously with food enough for three men.

"You say that Mr. Godfrey always quarrels with Mr. Ellerslie?" I asked, wishing to learn something more concerning my new companions.

"Not that exactly," said Nichols; "you see, sir, it takes two to make a quarrel, and Mr. Ellerslie is no to be drawn into that sort of thing, especially when, what with wine and brandy, and one thing and another, Mr. Godfrey is a wee bit out of his head. But I must not stand talking, sir, if you are not wanting me for anything else," he added, desirous, I thought, to escape the subject;

"they'll be wanting me to bring them the brandy."

He left me, and I have employed the time since then in writing this for you, dearest Alice. How I shall get on at Wingbourne I cannot guess, with no other society than its lazy, self-indulgent master, his nephew (of whom it would be difficult to say if he is most sot or most fool), and a young lady so flighty, or so ignorant of common propriety, as to wander over this wild country late at night. I am not likely to find much in common with any of them, and shall probably stay only a few days at the place.

CHAPTER III.

FLO'S HOME.

JULY 27TH.—A week has passed since the last entry in this journal, and since then I have made further acquaintance with the inhabitants of this strange old house; I hardly know whether, as a whole, they have gained or lost in my opinion, but as it is certainly modified in some particulars, I had better tell you seriatim what has occurred.

On the morning after my first arrival at at Wingbourne I rose tolerably early. The

noises in the house had not died away till late, and for two or three hours I was the undisturbed possessor of the house and grounds. I took this opportunity of making better acquaintance with the place than the short view I had already had gave me. Of the house itself, I had only yet seen the drawing and dining rooms, the long, barn-like entrance hall with a square wooden staircase of solid oak, but neither polished nor elegantly built, and the long, low corridor which led to my room; but further I could not venture to explore without due guidance. I opened the hall door, and went out into the enclosure of stable yards and cattle sheds. A cursory inspection showed me that these were well stocked, and I then sauntered off towards the garden, which, as I have said before, lay outside the wall and sunk fence, and communicated with the house by a narrow, paved walk, trellised at the sides with ivy, mingled now with roses in full bloom.

The garden showed the same want of unity

in design as the house, and was, if possible, still worse kept. A large, raggedly mown lawn was cut across in the middle by a group of fantastically shaped flower-beds; a terrace commanding a view of the gently encircling hills came suddenly to a stop before a brick wall, built as if with the express object of excluding all scenery whatever; and garden frames were placed close alongside of falling and decayed summer-houses. Still, owing to the sheltered situation of the house, both flowers and shrubs flourished better than in the surrounding country, and were seemingly as luxuriant as though we had been in the southern counties of England, instead of one bordering upon the bleak hills of North Wales; and the beauty of nature compensated for the disorder into which the neglect of man had allowed the garden to fall.

I had walked up and down for an hour or two, speculating concerning the strange character of my new acquaintances, when I heard myself hailed from afar, and, looking

round, saw Godfrey making his way towards me, across grass, gravel, and flower beds with equal indifference. I felt disinclined to meet him after his disgraceful ebullition the previous evening, but I remembered that if I were to stay a few days (it should not be more) in Mr. Carslope's house, I had better keep on good terms with his nephew, and, therefore, I met him with all the cordiality that he now seemed desirous of showing me. The cheery "good morning" with which he greeted me might have been owing to a wish of making amends, but more probably, for as he was at the time half drunk I did not give him credit for remembering his conduct, to some recent injunction of his uncle's to treat his guest with civility. But however hospitable his intentions were, he had not the wit to follow them up by any manner of conversation, and one attempt after another which I made fell through from his inability to carry them on. At last I mentioned hunting, and

on this subject, if no other, he was able to speak.

"I like it. I was in Leicestershire last winter—splendid hunting there. Not much chance in this place, but I brought my hunter here. A cleverish nag. Have you seen the stables? Shall I show him to you?"

"I passed them, but I paid no particular attention to any of the animals. It will give me great pleasure to see them with you."

We went towards the stable. As we walked his talk was entirely of horses and dogs. In this he took the lead, for I know but little of the matter—am content to admire a fine horse when he is shown me, without entering into all the points of skilful farriery, and am better acquainted with tiger-shooting than with any of our English sports. If I stay, I have no doubt I shall improve in all these qualifications for a country gentleman, for Godfrey's next discourse to me was upon the most sportsmanlike method to draw a

badger. For the present, however, he was intent upon showing me his horse.

"This is it," he said, leading out from its loose box the handsome creature upon whose merits he had been descanting. "You see what a forehand he's got and how well he's ribbed up."

I admired in all sincerity, while the horse, as if conscious that every word its master spoke was in its praise, bent its head towards him, and rubbed its nose fondly against his shoulder.

"And is that other horse yours also?" I asked, pointing to a dark grey, serviceable, but not handsome animal, which a groom was rubbing down; "or is that Mr. Carslope's?"

"That? Not my uncle's, he has better than that. That horse is Ellerslie's," and he added, under his breath. "An ill-conditioned brute, like himself!"

Desirous not to excite his anger again, I forbore to make any remark upon this aside, and merely asked,

"Does Mr. Ellerslie remain here for any length of time?"

"He may, if my uncle asks him. He seldom comes here, but when he does he often stays a week or two. I can't show you the prettiest beast in the stables. Flo' has that, but she will be back to-day, and then you can see Meg. I broke her in. She is high-spirited, and needs a strong hand; but Flo' is a good horsewoman, and can take a fence with the best of us. I did wish for her, to be sure, last winter in Leicestershire."

"Does Miss Carslope generally ride out alone on her long excursions?" I asked.

"As often as not. Sometimes I go with her. I asked her yesterday if I should go with her (if I had she would not have lost her way), but she preferred to be alone. She always does as she likes, and she always shall. We should have been married last autumn, only she preferred to wait another year."

"Married!" I exclaimed in astonishment.

The idea of a lady, for Mr. Carslope's daughter, though she might be eccentric and self-willed, must still be a lady, married to a boor like the man I was speaking to, with no education, and no natural gifts to compensate for the want of it, seemed to me preposterous and revolting. Dull-witted as he was, he understood the meaning of the incredulity my tone expressed, and answered surlily,

"I said 'married.' My cousin Flo' is to be my wife next September. We shall live here, and perhaps I shall change my name—at least, I would change it to Ellerslie, only it's his name."

The clanging sound of the alarum bell put an end to this lucid explanation, and with all his usual brusquerie of manner Godfrey muttered the word "breakfast," and took his way towards the house. I construed the word into an invitation and followed him.

The breakfast room, though smaller, was panelled and furnished much after the same pattern as the two rooms I had already seen.

Mr. Carslope was standing there, and with him his guest of the previous night.

Mr. Ellerslie was a different looking man to either Mr. Carslope or his nephew. His features had an intellectual cast like the old gentleman, but were destitute of the handsomeness which still distinguished his, and though more finely cut, were not nearly so comely as those of the clownish Godfrey. Not that I would have you infer he is ugly; he has nothing sufficiently striking about him to merit that name; it is a common, gentlemanly face, such as you may see every day in London, with nothing either in expression or feature to fix your attention on it. It might be described (if it must be described at all), in Olivia's words, "Item, two grey eyes with lids to them,—item, one nose, one chin, and so forth." And yet now I think of it, those aforesaid grey eyes do merit something more. They are very bright, very keen, and contain all the expression that is generally to be seen in his face. If he smiles, his eyes smile and

not his mouth; if he frowns, they have an intent glare in them. I have seen him angry now and then, and at those times they literally flash with rage. A sensitive nature might be withered up by their glance, and I have sometimes thought that, if looks could kill, Ellerslie might be responsible for one or two accidents of that nature. Similes apart, he does not look the sort of man one would care to make angry, and there are certain hard lines round his mouth which speak of an obstinate will and an unyielding temperament.

However, all these reflections were not made during that first morning at breakfast. I thought him then a common-place man enough,—rather tall, rather pale, but not striking in any way, and of any age between thirty and forty. He took his fair share of conversation, but not more, and what he said was sensible, always practical, and sometimes inclining to the saturnine. I learnt that he was a farmer, living about twenty miles from Wingbourne, in a far more rugged and barren

district. I heard, too, that he had not been here within the last six months.

"And now you are here I hope you will stay. You must not think of leaving us," said Mr. Carslope, with the same exuberant hospitality in his tone, as he had displayed to me the day before. Ellerslie made no reply. "Eh, Godfrey? I think we can make him comfortable, do not you?" pursued Mr. Carslope.

"He may stop or go, for what I care," was Godfrey's response, and he left the room.

Even Mr. Carslope, accustomed as he must necessarily be to the discourtesy of this ill-mannered clown, seemed struck by the ungraciousness of his answer, and felt it incumbent on him to apologise, but it was not to Mr. Ellerslie, the offended party, that he did so, but to me, who, as a stranger, might think it more necessary.

"The poor fellow is restless," he said, soothingly. "It is always so when my daughter is out. You have no idea how he

looks up to her. We must make allowances you know for him, Mr. Antony. And that reminds me that I want to have a few words with you in private, this morning."

"Pray don't let me be an interruption," said Ellerslie, and taking up a newspaper, the first I had seen in the house, and which I afterwards found he had brought there himself, he retired to the window.

"What I have to say is resolvable into a very few words, Mr. Antony," said the Master of Wingbourne. "You must excuse me if I offer a little advice. Some people give advice and others take it; our parts are severally allotted to us in this world. Your poor father, Wyvil, always used to give me advice, though I was two years his senior It all lies in habit and experience, and you are still young, so a word or two of caution . . ."

I intimated that I should never dream of taking exception at his advice.

"It mostly concerns yourself, too, for after all you would be the one to suffer. My

daughter Flo'—By-the-bye, Ellerslie, is she coming home by herself, or am I to send for her ?"

"By herself, I believe," answered Ellerslie, without looking up from his newspaper.

"As she pleases. Then, as I was saying, Antony, she will be home in a few hours; and as—in short, as she is not an ill-looking young woman, I would wish you to keep your heart perfectly whole, for she is as good as a married woman, I warn you, having been engaged to my nephew for many years."

I told him that Mr. Godfrey Thurston had already informed me of that fact, and was prepared to close the subject; but Mr. Carslope was not content to do so. He fidgetted uneasily in his chair, and after some hesitation, continued—

"He is not the husband in all respects I would have chosen for her. He has had no education, as I and your father had, and yourself also, Mr. Antony, but he has a good heart, and is very fond of her. And she may

make of him what she pleases. They will be a happy couple, though there does seem some disparity; but Flo' is very well content. She is much attached to him, and always has been since they were children together, and I should be very sorry if any attentions on your part were to make her less satisfied with our family arrangements."

"I assure you, sir, I have no desire of interfering in any manner. I should be very sorry to do so. Miss Carslope is the best judge of her own happiness."

"Aye, aye, but that is not quite enough. I may trust you, I am sure, not to wish to make her change her mind, after what I have told you, for she is to be married next September; but I shall be sincerely obliged to you if you will not show her any attentions, any of the manners of the great world, to which she has not been accustomed, living so much secluded, and which Godfrey, of course, poor lad, has never acquired."

"Mr. Wyvil will find it a hard business to

limit his powers of pleasing to matters in which Godfrey can excel him," said Ellerslie, in a dry tone of sarcasm.

"Ellerslie, you are hard on the poor lad. God knows he is not all I could wish for my successor on the estate, but he is my wife's nephew, and I will not have him maligned, even by you, or spoken worse of than he merits."

"There is no necessity to do that, in my opinion," was Ellerslie's indifferent reply, which provoked another remonstrance from Mr. Carslope, during which I escaped from the room, undesirous to be a witness of the family dissensions, if such existed, and rather mortified at the embargo laid upon my gallantry. I was not desirous to fascinate Miss Carslope; far from it. A woman who was content and satisfied with such a husband as had been selected for her by her father, could not have the refinement of taste which was necessary to make her tolerably pleasing. She was probably an illiterate, coarse, country girl, and

nothing more; but it was hard to be forbidden to be even commonly civil, for without coxcombry, Alice, it did not appear to me that, short of being absolutely rude and ungentlemanlike, I could fall behind the graces of her present lumpish admirer.

He joined me the moment I had left the house, and showed himself even more clownish than before. I guessed that he had been drinking already, early as it was in the day, and my contempt for him began to merge into positive repulsion. We were standing near the principal gate of the enclosure, talking, or rather saying a few words at intervals, and I was about to announce my intention of walking off by myself to explore the country, when a clear, girlish voice, close to us, as it seemed, called out,

"Godfrey, dear, open the gate."

A sudden illumination passed over the countenance of the young rustic; he looked for the moment positively handsome, as with an animation that reminded me of his excite-

ment the night before, he sprang towards the gate, and began to undo its complicated fastenings, saying joyously,

"Can't you clear it, Flo', or is Meg tired?"

"Still lame from last night, and I am, oh, so tired," said the voice, and the gate opening, the rider paced slowly in.

"Tired, are you? Let me lift you down, Flo'. She will go to the stables by herself, poor beastie. Loose her bridle—so. Now let me take you."

He lifted her off the saddle as he spoke, whilst I had ample opportunity to observe her, for it was full two minutes before she noticed me.

I would, if I could, give you a minute description of Miss Carslope, as I saw her then for the first time, but I am not sure I should be saying what I thought then, or what I think now after a whole week spent in each other's society. I saw a slight and not very tall girl, with brown masses of hair rather than curls, falling on her shoulders, and a

complexion that would be fair were it not somewhat tanned by constant exposure to the air, while exercise brings a rich, peach-like bloom to her cheeks. Her face is not, I believe, faultless in outline, but no one in looking at her could have the heart to discover a defect, for its expression of fearless and innocent confidence would disarm the severest critic. Her eyes are large and darker in colour than her hair, and have something of the bright shyness of the stag in their glance,—fearless so long as danger is not imminent, but showing little power to cope with it when it came. And as I looked at her I could not help thinking that the bonny Lesly, of whom Burns wrote that the deil's self would "look into thy bonny e'en and say 'I canna wrang thee,'" must have had much the same frank, truthful expression as Florence Carslope.

Had not her father told me her age, I should have judged her to be much younger than she really is ; either owing to her bright

and rather girlish face and slender figure, or to her lack of the polish of a woman of the world, she does not look as she is, nearly twenty. And yet she is very different from the rustic, awkward country girl, with manners but little superior to those of her destined bridegroom, whom I had begun to expect. There is about her a mixture of simplicity and untaught grace, which made me from the first feel I could never obey her father's injunction and treat her with inattention. She was dressed when I first saw her in a dark, closely-fitting riding habit, and a black hat, not of the high crowned, "cross country" species, with a black ostrich feather curling and losing itself amidst her disordered locks.

I believe Godfrey could have looked at her for the rest of the day without recollecting my presence, but Miss Carslope herself perceived me.

"Who is this gentleman, Godfrey?" she said. "You have not introduced me."

"I forgot his name," said Godfrey, candidly. "Stop! it's Mr. Antony—something; he came last night."

"Mr. Wyvil, whom father was expecting from India?" she asked, and she held out her little ungloved hand to me. It was small and soft, but rather brown, like her cheek. "Father will be very glad of your company," she continued; "he is very dull with only Godfrey and me to talk to him."

"I should be extremely glad if my being here is any pleasure to Mr. Carslope," I said, "but my visit to Wingbourne will be so short that—"

"Ah," she interrupted, "we have not anything to tempt you to stay." The words were spoken so simply, so without any expectation of producing a compliment, that it was with difficulty I remembered and obeyed her father's behest, and constrained myself to speak as simply as herself.

"Mr. Ellerslie told us you were safe last

night. Mr. Carslope was becoming very anxious for your return before he arrived."

"It was very kind of Cousin Ellerslie to come. I told him it was too late, and the house would be shut up; but I had no sooner sat down by Mrs. Clark's fire, than he mounted again and would come. Is he still here?"

"Yes, in the house with your father," I answered, mentally adding, "it is evident you are too sensible to share that cub's unreasoning antipathy towards his well meaning and respectable relation."

"How was it you met him, Flo', darling?" said the young Bœotian.

"I had lost my way, and it was getting dark, and I was beginning to be anxious about the road, for I had not been on that side of the hill for several months, and I think the place is altered. I met a man, and he directed me; but I missed the road again, and must have gone some miles out of the way; and after it grew quite dark, I met Ellerslie.

I was so frightened when I first heard a horse's feet, and so glad it proved to be him. He said it was too late for me to go home that night, as it was beginning to rain, and Meg was lame, and could not go much above a walk, and he took me to the farm, and asked Mrs. Clark to give me a night's lodging. She is a pleasant woman, and seemed glad to do it."

"And Mr. Ellerslie then came on here?" I said.

"Yes, he would not stay; he left us sitting down to supper—farm labourers and all. I forget what reason he gave, but I know his real motive was to remove father's anxiety."

Mr. Ellerslie must have judged from what his own feelings as a father would have been, not from what really existed, I thought, but what I said was prompted by seeing her look flushed and tired.

"I fear your ride has fatigued you. Are we not keeping you too long away from the house?"

"Are you tired, Flo'?" said her lover, with a sort of awkward anxiety.

He would never have noticed it till she had dropped from fatigue.

Miss Carslope acknowledged that she was, and we went into the house. She had a headache, she said, for she had been thinking about her father's anxiety during the night, and could not sleep. I was relieved to find it had not been her own will and intention to scare her family by remaining out all night. She was not so eccentric as I had imagined her, though heaven knows what difference that can make to me, or why I feel pleasure in finding her superior to what I thought her, if she is to be mated so far beneath her that her future life must be embittered by the consciousness of the inequality.

I saw her no more till the evening, and hardly anything of Godfrey; I believe he would gladly have devoted the whole day to her service, if he could. At any rate when I went into the drawing-room before dinner I

found her reclining on one of the sofas, and her uncouth adorer kneeling on the floor aside of her, not talking, but apparently perfectly content to hold her hand in his, and looking as dumb and as faithful in his devotion as her large mastiff Syphax, who was crouched at the foot of the sofa, intently watching her, and ready to wag his tail and cock his ears, when her unoccupied hand was passed over his shaggy coat, or a word of encouragement spoken to him. In this last respect he was better off than his human worshipper, for she did not speak to him at all; but he appeared perfectly satisfied without it.

I could not perceive that his satisfaction at her return made him drink any the less at dinner, indeed he rather exceeded; but that might be out of compliment to Ellerslie, who repeatedly refilled his glass as soon as empty, though not passing the bounds of the strictest moderation himself. But whilst thus pledging Godfrey to drink he eyed him with a cool contempt, which I shared, but which would

have been with me incompatible with encouraging him in excess.

As we entered the drawing-room, I heard Ellerslie say to Florence, in an undertone of which the sarcasm was judiciously veiled by concern,

"You must not leave us so soon another night. Your cousin needs some one to keep him within the bounds of moderation. For a young man his powers of drinking are unsurpassed."

"Could not you prevent him?" she asked, eagerly. "It passes my influence."

"If you fail, I should certainly not succeed. Such characters as his are very hardly influenced, but I thought he cared enough for you to abstain."

Our party arranged itself for the evening. Mr. Carslope endeavoured to secure us for a game at whist, but this, Ellerslie declining, and the nephew not being considered capable of bearing a hand, was abandoned. I was again summoned to be his antagonist in backgam-

mon, to my annoyance, while Ellerslie seated himself near Florence, and began talking to her, undisturbed by the presence of the cub, who took his station near them, leaning over the back of a chair, and watching with, I fancy, somewhat obscured vision the faces of the two. Florence now and then addressed a word to him, as if to show him he was not quite forgotten; but in general the subjects of the conversation must have been far beyond his comprehension. I lost several points of the game in endeavouring to catch what was said, but without success, for we were separated by the entire length of the room; but as the smoking had not been quite so long indulged in as on the previous evening, and the atmosphere of the room was clearer, I was able to study the countenances of the group. Godfrey, with a sort of heavy yet eager curiosity to know what they said; Ellerslie, with his dark, keen eyes fixed on her face with an expression of admiration I could not misread; and Florence, simple and unem-

barrassed, talking because she was interested in the subject, but with no view to effect, and not an atom of self-consciousness. I could have watched them for many hours.

CHAPTER IV.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

DIARY CONTINUED.—The next morning I was standing alone in the drawing-room, turning over the only thing in the shape of a book visible, a book of flies for angling, made with considerable skill and neatness. I had always despised angling as a useless and unsocial employment, but I began to fancy that in the present dearth of objects of interest, I might be obliged to take it up. As I was lazily speculating which fly might be the best for a

tyro to begin with, a dress brushed past me, and looking up I saw Florence standing aside of me.

She was dressed as she always is, very simply; generally in silk of some dark colour, with no ornament, not even a brooch to relieve it, and her hair brushed away from her face, and falling in heavy, unstudied curls. Yet there is an air of refinement about her which I have seldom seen equalled. And her voice and manner, though perfectly unaffected, are always sweet and feminine. She was the first to speak.

"You are looking at those flies, Mr. Wyvil. I made most of them myself last winter, with Godfrey. He is a very tolerable angler. Are you?"

"I know hardly anything about it, but if he will instruct me I shall have great pleasure in learning," I answered, with some hypocrisy.

"You will like it—at least you may like it;" and then she added after a moment's

pause, "I do not think you will care about it."

"Why not? We like whatever we can excel in, and of course I mean to excel. Why should you think I cannot like it, if Mr. Thurston does?"

"Because you want more lively amusements, perhaps," said Florence, simply. "Anglers are obliged to be silent, and had better, I believe, be alone; so, though I often go out with Godfrey, I generally take a book, and read it the whole time."

"The best resource with such a companion," I mentally rejoined; but said aloud, "You have then some books in the house, Miss Carslope? Is there a library? I have seen no books in any room I have been in."

"We have not many," said Florence; "at least, not what you would call many, though I have not read half of them; but we have nothing new that you would care to see."

"What does your father read in the winter, when it rains? Newspapers?"

"We do not take newspapers. Father does not care about them. Mr. Ellerslie sends us the local one every week, after he has read it."

"And you have no lending library or book club?" I asked, with some amusement, not contemptuous, Alice, (at least not of her); but I suppose she thought it sounded so, for her colour rose as she answered,

"We have nothing but some old books that used to belong to father when he was young, and a few mother had. I am glad your visit is in the summer time, Mr. Wyvil, when you will feel the want of these amusements less. Had it been the winter, you would not have been able to endure a day without them, though your society is a very great delight to my father."

"I am by no means such a bookworm as you suppose me to be," I answered, hastily. "I can enjoy a good book of any sort when I get it, but I think the man who cannot pass a day, or a summer even, without one, must

have profited very little by what he has read. Will you show me this old library?"

"Have you not seen it?"

"I know only a few rooms in the house. I was waiting for your guidance, Miss Carslope, before I explored further."

"I will show you at once," she said; and I followed her, glad to have secured her for my companion for an hour without interruption.

I had caught sight of her churlish swain in the stable yard, and guessed that he was not likely to break away from his favourite employments, and Mr. Ellerslie was, I knew, talking to the Master of Wingbourne, so we were left unmolested. It was pleasant to walk by her side, though it were only for a short time, and listen to her voice, the only pleasant voice in the house. Mr. Godfrey Thurston's mode of speech I have already described; her father's, though it had a cheery ring, was now too much associated with insincerity and

selfishness to be altogether agreeable; and Ellerslie's, though quite refined and gentlemanly, had a touch of harshness and irony running through it, that spoiled it for my ears. The servants, with the exception of old Nichols, who was a Scotchman, spoke with the broadest Welsh accent, so that Florence Carslope's sweetly attuned English was like music in comparison.

She took me through a door leading out from one side of the hall, into what I soon discovered to be the oldest part of the house. A long, low corridor, the floor covered with matting, running the whole length of the house, with rooms on each side, disused and for the most part with closed shutters; but through chinks in these the daylight dimly forced its way, betraying a venerable stateliness the rest of Wingbourne utterly lacked. The furniture was scanty, and in some rooms entirely wanting, but the smooth oaken floors, well-proportioned windows, handsome mantel-

pieces, and in some cases, scrolled and ornamental ceilings, showed that the house had once been far superior to its present condition.

In the furthest of the rooms Florence stopped and began to take down the shutters. I offered to assist her.

"The fastenings are very simple," she said, "or else have been used more than the others. We need only open one window. You do not want to read the books, only to see that there are a few."

There were three or four heavy oaken cases ranged round the room, and these were filled with old and dingily bound volumes, for the most part thickly deep in dust. On the upper shelves lay some gayer books, albums, and literary keepsakes of far back years, as dusty as the rest.

"But this is Latin; a treatise on law," I said, in surprise, taking out one of the books. "You do not read this, Miss Carslope?"

"No, my father was to have been a lawyer

when he was young. I read no language but English," said Florence, adding, half timidly, "I daresay you have sisters, Mr. Wyvil, and that they are very accomplished."

"I have only one," I said, "and she is married, and lives in India. She is certainly very clever." (You must forgive me, Alice, for acknowledging thus much).

"Is she of your own age?"

"Older by three or four years. I wish you had happened to see her when she was in England. You would have liked her."

"I wish we had. We see no one," said Florence. "No lady, I mean; and Mr. Joy is the only person I like."

"I have not met him."

"He is a clever man; studied as a doctor, I believe, but since he settled here he has never practised, except as a veterinary surgeon. Father always asks him to come if there is anything amiss on the farm. Shall we go on? I can come back and close the shutters afterwards."

At the end of the corridor was a staircase, which led to the gallery above, and this again gave access to several empty rooms. As Florence threw open the doors of these, she heard her name called loudly from below.

"Don't trouble yourself to come to us, Flo', my darling," said Mr. Carslope, as he slowly mounted the stairs. "We heard you come this way, and Ellerslie could not rest content unless he came too. You are showing Mr. Wyvil the house, are you, darling?"

"Yes, father, but he has seen all that is worth seeing, except the kitchens—they are old, I believe. I forgot the billiard room. You play billiards, I suppose?" she added, turning to me, and I assented.

"Another point of sympathy between us," said Mr. Carslope, smiling. "I have only a chance of a game when Ellerslie is here, except now and then with Flo', for Godfrey does not care for those things. He is no player of any sort. He will not practise enough for

games of skill, and games of chance he thinks utterly stupid."

"A fortunate thing for him with such associates as his," I thought, but Ellerslie seemed to view the matter differently; he observed,

"Perhaps he says he does not like them when he is at home with you."

"Godfrey never says one thing and means another!" exclaimed Florence, with more asperity than I had supposed to be in her nature; and she added, half pleadingly, to her father, "let us go down, now; we have seen everything."

"Have you shown Mr. Wyvil your sanctum, Florence?" said Ellerslie, who seemed perfectly indifferent to her anger.

"I never take any one there, cousin," she answered, but her father interrupted her,

"Pshaw! let us see it all, Flo', now we are up here. It is a ghostly old place enough, and I should not care to stay there by myself after dark, as I have known you

do, time and again; but we are a good company together now, so let us see it."

Florence demurred no farther, but unlocking a door at the end of the gallery, the furthest removed from the staircase and window, she led the way up another flight of dark, steep stairs.

"Open the door at the top, my child," cried Mr. Carslope, as we groped our way up.

She did so, but the light which glimmered in was a very faint one, nor could we have guessed that we were coming to an attic with four large windows, till we actually stood at the top and looked round.

It was the oddest sort of sanctum that a young lady ever had. A large attic, high in the centre, but the roof gradually sloping towards the sides. There were, as I have said, four large windows, but from only one of them could any view be seen, for the others were thickly veiled with dust and cobwebs. Curious old furniture was pushed up against the sides of the room, without any attempt at

arrangement. Old mahogany cupboards, made at a time when mahogany was a scarcer wood than now; others of the blackest oak, quaintly carved with grinning heads, and contortions of arabesque. A mirror in Venetian setting, the silver tarnished with age, and a large crack across the middle of it, was fastened up at one end of the attic, and hanging on the opposite wall were two old portraits, the likenesses of long forgotten people, with the flesh tints faded to a ghastly yellow, standing out from the homogeneous black to which the rest of the picture had turned. A map of England and another of the World, equally discoloured and almost illegible, hung between the windows, and these were surmounted by bunches of dried, drooping grass. No sign of needlework or any other feminine occupation could be seen; a little table and a low chair drawn up in front of the clean window, the only evidence that the room was ever occupied, and the sole things free from dust. Even in the cheery

morning light, when the sun was streaming in brightly through the southern window, the attic had a forlorn, desolate appearance, and on any gloomy day, or when visited by the pale moonlight, I could imagine it had a most ghostly effect. I felt with Mr. Carslope some surprise that his daughter should care to stay here.

"A gloomy place and very dusty, Flo'," he said. "Shall not Bessy come and arrange it for you?"

"I like it best as it is, father," she answered.

"There is the only thing you like in it," said Ellerslie, pointing with his hand to the window. "It is the only view you have in the house."

The prospect was certainly beautiful enough to justify Florence's taste. The hills which closed in round the house on other sides broke away towards the south, and let in a widely extended scene of valley and cliff, bare heath and cultivated fields, and a

river, meandering silvery white in the distance. The whole was now glowing in the luxury of a glorious July sun. A straggling grove of trees effectually shut out this view from the lower rooms of the house, but here, in this elevated eyrie, Florence could enjoy it, and doubtless it formed her chief reason for liking the place.

"I wish those trees were away," said Florence, as we all drew near to the window.

"Can't be, Flo,'" replied her father. "Some years hence their timber may be valuable. It would be sheer waste to cut them down now."

"Yes, I know," said Florence, "but I think the beauty of one's own house ought to outweigh that. Don't you, Ellerslie?'

"Of an ancestral home—yes, but you cannot expect strangers to the family to care for that," he answered, with so much significance, that we could only look at the view in silence.

We soon after left the room. At the bottom of the staircase we met Godfrey.

"Have you been showing Mr. Wyvil the garret, Flo' ?" he asked, with a jealous accent. "You never let me come there."

"She prefers only to show the view to those who can appreciate it," said Ellerslie, who had a design, as it seemed, to irritate him.

Godfrey looked angry, and Florence reproachfully at him.

"Godfrey and I are going for a ride," she hastened to say, interrupting her cousin's angry rejoinder. "Will you run and order the horses, Godfrey, dear? Father, will you join us?"

"No, my dear; you go too fast and too far for me, but Mr. Wyvil will. Godfrey, order a horse to be saddled for Mr. Wyvil."

"You do not ask me," said Ellerslie to Florence, as we re-passed through the matted gallery, "but I shall take the privilege of an old friend, and come without an invitation."

"If you do, you will entertain Mr. Wyvil," said Florence.

He made no answer, unless a keenly admiring glance was one.

Our ride began in harmony, but this did not last long. About two miles from the Wingbourne estate, we came to the river which I had seen from the garret. It was not wide, but though the water ran fast and deep, it was only crossed by two planks, laid side by side loosely, without any handrail or other support. Some accident had happened to the bridge, they told me, during the last winter's floods, and it had not yet been replaced.

"We must dismount," said Ellerslie. "You must not attempt to ride across, Florence."

He sprang off his horse and came to her side to assist her. Godfrey, at the same time, pushed his horse unceremoniously between them, forcing Ellerslie a step or two back.

"Stand back! what are you about?" asked Ellerslie, sharply.

"Thank you, I like Godfrey's help best," said Miss Carslope, hurriedly "I am used to it, and his arm is the strongest."

With a smile of the broadest triumph did Godfrey dismount, and fairly lift the lady from her saddle in his stalwart arms. If a look could have withered the strength of those arms, as the Italian peasants believe of the evil eye, he would have been a cripple henceforth; I never saw a look of such undying hatred in any man's face as in Ellerslie's that moment, but Godfrey was insensible to it. Ellerslie gave no vent to his passion in words, but seizing with a hasty hand the bridle of the horse Florence had ridden, attempted to urge him across the planks. The beast was frightened at the unsteady footing, and refused to move on.

"She'll not move so. I'll not have the mare's mouth hurt in that way," said Godfrey, who, as usual, seemed ripe for a quarrel.

"Leave go, Ellerslie, you're not fit to manage a cart-horse."

"Cousin Ellerslie, give the horse to him," exclaimed Florence, anxiously. I looked at her, her fair brow was clouded with anxiety; she evidently feared some coming outbreak. "Let Godfrey take all four horses across. He is used to them, and can manage it."

Ellerslie loosed his hold of the bridle, and came up the bank to where she stood, saying as he approached her,

"It would not be strange if he does understand their management. Having spent his life amongst grooms and horsejockeys, he may well aspire to that accomplishment."

I could not in my heart but acknowledge the truth of this remark, though at the same time admiring the temper and admirable patience which Godfrey displayed in soothing the refractory and frightened horses, patting them, speaking to them in caressing tones, and finally inducing them one by one to step cautiously after him over the bridge.

Florence answered, reproachfully, "It is unkind of you, Ellerslie; doubly unkind, because you are so much the eldest, to quarrel with Godfrey on every occasion."

"It is not I who quarrel with him," said Ellerslie. "I forbear with him greatly, more than I would do were he not your cousin."

"You might forbear on your own account," said Florence, "you are his relation too, and have so much more experience and knowledge of the world than he has."

"It is enough that you wish it," interrupted Ellerslie. "I would do a greater thing to pleasure you than merely avoiding causes of dispute with a rude churl like Godfrey Thurston."

"When you call him a churl," repeated Florence, with a heightened colour, "you should remember you speak of my future husband. If you insult him, you insult me as well."

The two had before this part of the dialogue turned away from me, and walked off to some

yards distance, out of earshot, had not the clear distinct tones of both Ellerslie and his angry kinswoman been raised somewhat beyond their usual pitch. I remained alone, with my eyes fixed on the horses, but unable not to feel deep interest in a conversation which seemed as if it might throw so much light on Miss Carslope's feelings towards her cousin.

"I do not believe that he will be your future husband," continued Ellerslie. "You have obtained one respite already. Your father will not, cannot insist on such a sacrifice."

"Who tells you that it is a sacrifice?" retorted Florence, more and more angry. "Why may I not be acting by my own free will?"

"My eyes, my intellect, tell me you cannot love him," said Ellerslie, with cold emphasis. "What is there about him to deserve it? He is unworthy of you in every way. I could find you a dozen of my own farm labourers his superior in sense; any gentleman's son

twelve years old has more acquirements; any groom will ride better than he does. He has no recommendations whatever. If you marry him you will pine out your life in discontent and unhappiness, finding out when it is too late that he has not one thought or aspiration in common with you."

If I had ever doubted that Miss Carslope could look angry, I should have been convinced then; she had after all the hot Ellerslie blood in the same measure as her overbearing kinsman. "How long is it since you have had this high opinion of me?" she interrupted. "Listen to me for one minute! I utterly decline to enter into this discussion. It neither befits me as Godfrey's future wife, or you as his relation; but I must say this—that you do him injustice; he has moral qualities, patience, gentleness, and a loving, constant nature, that can never fail or disappoint me. Even Mr. Wyvil, who has known him so lately, has a far better opinion of him than you have."

"His patience and gentleness are peculiarly recognisable after dinner," said Ellerslie, with a smile.

"I will hear no more!" cried Florence, holding up her hand imperiously, and she ran down the steep bank towards the plank bridge, and there beckoned to me.

"Mr. Wyvil, shall we cross now? Godfrey has the horses all rightly over, but I should be very glad of your hand to take me across."

I hastened forwards to give her my assistance. On the other side we remounted, and looked round for Ellerslie. He was still standing where she had left him, engaged in knocking off the heads of the tallest grasses with his riding whip.

"I am coming," he said, seeing that the whole party was waiting for him; but he rode moodily and silently for the next few miles, nor was it till towards the close of the ride, that he recovered his good-humour.

CHAPTER V.

RIVALRY.

DIARY CONTINUED:—It was impossible to me then, and is still difficult, to understand the terms on which Ellerslie stands with the Carslope family. There is certainly little love lost between them. His dislike of Godfrey is most cordially returned, nor do I think there is any liking on his part for Mr. Carslope, and yet he seems privileged to speak his mind to them with a freedom which a life long friend would hesitate to use. Habit has

made Mr. Carslope tolerate in him what, if any other were to attempt to imitate, would be resented at once; he is, I believe, afraid of him, and at any rate has a respect for his opinion. Even Florence (who certainly does not fear him), though she resented highly his interference between her and Godfrey which I recounted in the last page, appeared to forget it all, and treated him with not less cordiality than usual.

But I have not since then heard any repetition of the offence on his part; he no longer presumes to lecture her, or audaciously intrude upon her confidence. His admiration for her is evidently sincere, and he loses no opportunity of displaying it, though I do not think Florence as yet is aware of it. She appears to me to be so accustomed to be the first object of those around her as to overlook the signs of admiration which other girls would be prompt to recognise. But to me, who am more clear-sighted, his attentions to her are most irritating. I have no sufficient reason

to give why they should be so. He cannot hope, any more than if he were a stranger like myself, to win the first place in her heart. He stands towards her in precisely the same position that I or any other man might do; debarred, by her long engagement with Godfrey, from ever feeling more than a friendly interest in her; and she treats us very similarly, with the sort of simple ease and absence of coquetry which her nature as well as the circumstances of the case demand. And yet, though her manner towards us is exactly the same, and towards both different from the peculiar confidence she bestows on Godfrey, I am infinitely more jealous when Ellerslie sits talking to her in the house, or rides his horse along side hers, than I am of the fond, half doggish attentions of Godfrey, who is after all the only one who has a right to show her any at all.

I said jealous, and you will perhaps startle at it, but there is no use in disguising it any longer; I am jealous, and I do love her, hope-

less as my affection may seem. I have known her only a week, and she is different, very different, from any woman that I expected to love. She has not one single accomplishment, she is ignorant of the commonest school acquirements, she knows nothing of the world or of society, and etiquette would be an abstruse science to her; and yet, with all this lack of what I used to consider most necessary, she is fascinating to me. And still, whilst I acknowledge this, I know that she can never be mine. I know at least that her father's wishes, her own consent, the united force of habit and family agreement have given her to her cousin. I believe she is resigned to her future destiny, though I do not think she can feel much of love for Godfrey Thurston, and perhaps it is for this very reason that I do not feel jealous of him; whereas, supposing that barrier to be removed, Ellerslie might be my rival, and a competent one. He evidently does not consider the obstacle insuperable, as her father has in honour

bound me to consider it; and if she were free he would woo her and possibly win her, for he has the claim of long acquaintanceship, which I have not. But were her present engagement once broken, he should not win her without a struggle. However, it is useless to talk of what might take place in such an event. She is pledged to marry Godfrey, than whom a more unworthy mate her father could hardly have found her; and speculation as to what would happen, were it not so, is in vain.

Meantime, Ellerslie still stays on. I endeavoured to learn from Nichols what was the original cause of the animosity which exists between him and young Godfrey, for their rivalry with regard to Florence is too recent to have begun it. Nichols answered me doubtfully at first,

"Well, sir, it's no just that it can be called a dislike, for Mr. Ellerslie is but seldom here, and the young master has very little to say to him when he comes; he keeps himself to

himself. Nor would I go so far as to say there's any great kindness between them. It's just a coolness; but Mr. Ellerslie is thoroughly proud, and when he is here never interferes in any way in the estate."

"No, I should think not," I said. "What pretext could he have for doing so?"

"Well, sir, there's a many say that he has the most right, seeing as till he was a lad of ten years of age, old Mr. Ellerslie, the old gentleman, Miss Florence's grandfather, had some idea of leaving the place to him, so as to keep the old name in it, for this used to be called the Ellerslie estate, you may be aware, sir. However, the young ladies, Mrs. Carslope, and her sister that was, Mrs. Thurston, had it, as was but right; but it happened so, you ken, sir, that after Mr. Godfrey, Mr. Ellerslie is the next heir; and it's like he does not forget that always."

"And how near a relation is he?" I asked.

"He was third cousin to the young ladies,

sir," answered Nichols—"that is, I don't rightly ken what you call it in England, to Miss Florence; but near or not, I mind well the time when it was thought he would have the estate."

"The jealousy is well explained," I thought; but the old majordomo went on,

"There's some have thought, sir, it was a pity Miss Florence was not to marry Mr. Ellerslie instead of Mr. Godfrey; but the master could never hear of any change being made. He loves Mr. Godfrey like his own son."

"And Florence acquiesces with her father's decision," I thought, sadly. It is hard to believe that she is content with it; yet, why should I wish to convince myself that she does not love him, but feels only compassion and indifference, since, if she marries him, and that seems inevitable, a clearer sense of his demerits would only ensure her greater unhappiness.

Yesterday evening—it was Sunday—we

had another scene of contention between the kinsmen; and were I Mr. Carslope, I should never again suffer the presence of both in the same house. It happened in this wise.

Ellerslie has for the last few days observed a strict neutrality towards Godfrey Thurston; but has on every occasion sought to ingratiate himself with Florence. Yesterday, while talking with her, in the garden, before dinner, he happened to gather a single rosebud, and handed it to her. There was no appearance of gallantry in the act, and she took it as simply as it was given, and fastened it in the front of her dress, not out of consideration for the ornament, but only, as I believe, because she wanted her hands disengaged for something else. Godfrey, who was walking at a little distance, though apparently engaged only in knocking off buds and leaves with his riding whip, which he seldom lays aside, observed the offering, and resolved to repeat it. Whether he thought it a gallant action to present a flower, and was

unwilling that Ellerslie should have the sole credit of it, or he fancied one rose was not sufficient for her merits, I know not; but as we sat down to table, he presented to her a large bunch of red and white flowers, massy, round, and large, as are the bouquets to be seen placed before the shrines of Italian churches. Florence thanked him with her accustomed sweet graciousness, and placed it beside her on the table, where it remained during the meal; and she shunned to meet Ellerslie's smile, as with eyes full of contemptuous amusement, he scanned the enormous offering.

I have noticed that for the last two or three days she has remained longer with us at table than at first, reluctant, as it seemed, to leave Godfrey to the temptation of the wine, for a look or whispered word from her will at times induce him to be more moderate in the indulgence. But last night her father appeared disposed for a longer carouse than usual, and dismissed her, saying,

"Have the candles placed in the billiard-room, Flo', and be there ready for us. We will see if our hands are steady enough for a match."

She went reluctantly. As I opened the door for her, her cousin called out,

"Flo', you have left my roses. Don't you care for them?"

"Care? yes, certainly I do," she said, and came back and took the bunch. Then leaning over his chair, she said one or two words in a whisper; I think they were, "Be prudent; don't take too much, for my sake."

An hour passed by, and Godfrey so far forgot her injunctions as to be rather less prudent than usual. The glasses were drained with a rapidity even unusual for Wingbourne; and when Mr. Carslope rang the bell for some other bottles of wine, his already half-intoxicated nephew called for the spirit stand. Ellerslie, whose habits are habitually moderate, and myself had long been talking apart, when Mr. Carslope at last gave

the signal to leave the table; and we adjourned to the billiard-room, his nephew following us with flushed face and unsteady step.

Florence was there; and the moment his eye encountered her, he saw she still wore in her dress the flower Ellerslie had given her, and that his own ponderous bunch, duly placed in water, stood on a side table.

"How is this?" he exclaimed, in angry, excited tones. "Flo' cares for other flowers better than she does for mine!"

Florence looked at him with surprise. I am sure she had till that moment quite forgotten the slight decoration. On seeing it, she hastened to interpose, with a ready playfulness that, had he been in his sober senses, could not have failed to win him—

"You shall give me another, to-morrow, Godfrey. It would be a pity that your fine bouquet should be withered in my service."

Here all might have ended, had not Ellerslie been as desirous to provoke a quarrel as

she was to prevent it. "It is a pity that any less graceful ornament than this should be worn," he whispered, in a gay tone of gallantry, which always irritates me. I had, of course, no right to interfere, although the restriction Mr. Carslope had laid on me not to make myself agreeable to his daughter, must apply with equal force to Ellerslie. But Godfrey had the privilege to be jealous, and was not slow to use it. He thundered out,

"Speak up! Say what you have to say aloud, and be d——. We'll have no whispering here! Why did you ask Flo' to wear your rose instead of mine?"

"He did not," said Florence, hurriedly. "See here, Godfrey, I have taken it out at once. Choose any one you like for me, and I shall like it much better."

Her face was very pale, for she saw the state of excitement he was in, and feared the consequences it might lead to. She laid her hand on his arm coaxingly, while Ellerslie observed, with a sarcastic smile on his lips,

"Of course, if you menace her, she must wear your graceful offering. Whatever her real wishes may be, she must hide them to humour a drunkard!"

A volley of oaths was his reward for this taunting speech, and Godfrey flew back into the hall, intent, as it seemed, on the search for some more effective weapon than words. Ellerslie made a step towards following him.

"Stop! oh stop!" cried Florence, springing after him. "Oh, Mr. Wyvil!" and she turned an imploring glance to me. "Go after Godfrey. Keep him back, for Heaven's sake."

I did not need to be told twice, but darted into the hall, where I found Godfrey in possession of a heavy riding whip, and already returning. I caught his arm and bade him give me the whip; but received it across my face, accompanied with abuse I need not repeat, for delaying him. Then, furious at the sight of Ellerslie, who, con-

temptuous of his anger, or desirous to provoke it further, appeared at the doorway, he darted towards him, whip in hand. Ellerslie stood on his guard. He pushed back Florence, who would have sprung between them, and as Godfrey rushed at him with uplifted arm, he delivered a well-planted blow on his chest, which laid the unhappy youth prostrate on the floor, from whence, momentarily stunned by the fall, he did not attempt to rise.

"Ellerslie, how can you!" exclaimed Florence, indignantly. "You have provoked him to this. Is this the way to treat my father's nephew, in this house?"

"The only way when he is drunk," said Ellerslie, carelessly. "I am grieved to hurt your feelings; but I trust he will have the sense not to try to horsewhip me in future, and you may be spared such scenes. And now the best kindness I can do him will be to leave him to himself." He took out his cigar-case, struck a match, and lit his

cigar, with as much deliberate unconcern as though he had no other object in life than to do it systematically, opened the hall-door, and was gone.

Mr. Carslope now came out of the billiard room to condole with his discomfited and somewhat sobered nephew; nor did he, to my astonishment, volunteer a single word of reproof to him for his insulting conduct towards Ellerslie, their mutual guest; though, when he saw the purple marks which the riding whip had left across my face, he hastened to assure me of his exceeding regret that it should have happened, and a hope that I would not bear malice. Then, bent on soothing the ruffled feelings of his nephew, he proposed that they should have a glass together.

Florence, who since Ellerslie had quitted the field had not said a word, but hidden her face in her hands, now looked up. Her face was crimson with shame for the conduct of her father and lover, as she caught my eye.

"Mr Wyvil, what must you think of us?" she murmured. "Believe me, this is unusual. You saw how Ellerslie provoked him. I dare not hope you will stay with us after such an insult."

"I do pity you, sincerely, Miss Carslope," I answered. I could not extenuate or disguise my disgust at the conduct of her relations; and she would have thought me insincere if I had tried to do so.

She said no more, but hurried from the hall to come back no more that evening, and I soon followed her example, for I was indisposed to take part in the orgie of drinking that was likely to ensue. I heard the sounds of hilarity carried on far beyond midnight, but no more quarrelling, by which I inferred that Ellerslie had not rejoined them. The gentlemen were at length helped to their rooms, and the revel closed.

And now the question arises—what ought I to do? Ought I to stay at Wingbourne—a place so very different to what must have

been my father's anticipations? I feel strong contempt for Mr. Carslope, aversion to his nephew, and dislike towards Ellerslie, and yet I could not leave this house without a regret that will follow me wherever I go. This beautiful, unfortunate girl, whose fate is linked with these wretched beings, exercises a spell over me which I cannot resist. I cannot endure the idea of leaving her, so superior in intelligence and refinement to those around her, so completely in their power, so isolated from any friend who can love her with the affection she merits. I have thought once or twice that she was beginning to feel confidence in me; she has now and then appealed to me for support, or come to me for assistance in any pursuit which Godfrey is incapable of appreciating; and I have struggled to maintain an easy indifference in my looks, and to speak to her only with the civil coolness of a friend. I am sure she cannot know the extent of what

I feel for her, but yet I think she would miss me if I were to go.

You will say, Alice, that all this points out emphatically that my duty is to leave Wingbourne. Since (to the best of my belief) her fate is settled for her, and she will, before many months, be Godfrey Thurston's wife, it is foolish in me to risk my own happiness by remaining longer near her; but I repeat, my happiness is already staked, and I shall only drag a lengthening chain behind me on leaving Wingbourne. It is for her sake, and hers alone, that I still doubt whether it is not my duty to go. Shall I, by staying, endanger her peace of mind?

You have often told me, Alice, that in your opinion all men are coxcombs, and think every woman's heart may be won—that they have only to throw the handkerchief, and she will willingly stoop for it. But without agreeing to this slander, I still think that I might, if I were not in honour forbidden to

try for it, win Florence Carslope's heart. Her destined bridegroom is so inferior, not only to the men she might see, but even to those she has met, that she cannot feel the esteem for him on which, alone, affection can safely rest. I am persuaded that her affection for him is not the love of which her heart is capable; it is the effect of habit, cousinly kindness, a sense of protection with which she regards him, but he can inspire nothing deeper. And I do think I might win her if I had the fair chance to try. If her present choice is not unalterable, and Ellerslie seems to think it is not, I have as good a right as he to essay my fortune.

I have sometimes fancied that Mr. Carslope may have laid his commands on me with the same purpose as the Genie in the Arabian tale, who forbids the prince to think of the lady he has ordered him to bring him, solely to try his honourable mettle, and recompenses him with her hand when he is satisfied. It is not likely that a father should wish to

control his daughter's inclinations; he must desire to secure for her the worthiest husband in his power, and even if his own wishes decidedly point to Godfrey Thurston, he will be ready to forego them for her advantage. Why, therefore, should I go away? If, indeed, she must be Thurston's wife, my most prudent and honourable course would be to leave her; but an engagement is not indissoluble like a marriage, and if I have a chance of success, it would be folly in me to abandon it without a struggle.

Had I you, dearest sister, with me, or within reach of the daily post, I should profit by your counsel. I know you would discover the honourable course, and I feel I could better follow it, pointed out by your hand, than debating on it by myself. But before these lines meet your eye (if indeed they ever should) I shall either be Florence's accepted lover, or have settled down into the dreary, solitary, and hard-working law-student.

I must just add that Ellerslie left the

house, and returned to his own farm, yclept Llanfydd, this morning, before Godfrey had risen, so we are likely to have some short respite from their quarrels.

CHAPTER VI.

WINGBOURNE POLITICS.

We shall still avail ourselves of Mr. Antony Wyvil's journal, which he continued for some time to keep, but shall take the liberty of abandoning his precise words as unsuited to our purpose. He had accurately described the inmates of Wingbourne, but as a stranger, it was impossible for him to make due allowances for the circumstances which had largely contributed to mould the Carslope family to its present condition.

Mr. Carslope had been in his youth a somewhat dissipated and high-spirited young man, liked very generally by his friends, but not possessed of any sound moral principle to guide him through life. He had been more fortunate than he deserved, in the wife which fate had given him. Mrs. Carslope was a woman of a warm heart and sweet temper, gifted also with considerable talent and energy; she sincerely loved her husband, and was blind to his faults, and during her lifetime her capable hand guided the reins of the household and estate so well, that his indolence and incapacity for business were not visible to others. But when she died, the blank she left in her family and household was one which he was incapable of supplying, and the only mark of judgment he showed in the management of his affairs was to leave matters as far as possible in the hands to which she had confided them. Thus the estate was intrusted to the care of the bailiff whom she had appointed, and who, being an honest

man, did his duty by the property, and kept it, in some degree, from the ruin to which the indolence of its master would have consigned it; and the house affairs were kept in organisation by the old butler Nichols, and his coadjutor the housekeeper, a practical woman, who had been trained under Mrs. Carslope's own eye, and had imbibed her talent in ruling the household. These two functionaries exercised a mild despotism over Mr. Carslope and his daughter, which, as it was exerted for their benefit, neither thought of disputing, particularly as they knew that if either of the reigning authorities were deposed, a burden of responsibility, which Florence's ignorance, and her father's indolence, rendered them unable to cope with, would devolve on their unwilling shoulders.

Mr. Carslope had no more done his duty by his daughter than he had by the property. His wife had been a tender and judicious mother, not only to her little girl, but to her dead sister's child, who had been left to her

care ; but at her death Mr. Carslope had allowed the children to grow up as they best could. He lavished a great amount of fondness upon Florence, but no systematic attention. If she was troublesome, she was occasionally indulged, but more often sent away, and sometimes days would pass without his seeing her. Education she had none, nor did her father seem to think it necessary. The old majordomo had taught her readin g and writing, declaring that it was a shame that her father allowed her to grow up more like a little savage than one of the ladies of the land, and he had once or twice so far overcome his deference for his master as to urge him to send her for a few years to school. Mr. Carslope admitted the soundness of the advice, but he foresaw that his home would be silent and solitary without the little feet pattering in and out, or the little brown head and dancing eyes beside him at dinner, and he put off from year to year the sending her away. Of sacrifice for her's or any one's

sake, Mr. Carslope had not an idea ; the idle, illiterate life he was leading suited him well enough, and therefore, he thought, would satisfy his daughter; so he limited his teaching to various games with which she might amuse him in the long winter evenings, and when he found her crouched down on the hearth rug, poring over some book by the quivering firelight, or perched aside of her attic window, essaying to write, he had stroked her head fondly, praised her industry, and then effectually put a stop to it by calling her to ride or walk with him, or join him in some occupation which had his own pleasure rather than her improvement in view.

With no other home society than his little daughter's, and too indolent to seek fresh acquaintance, or keep up the county visiting, which Mrs. Carslope had considered a family duty to maintain, it was not to be wondered at that he fell into habits of sensual self-indulgence. His only habitual guest who might have had a civilising influence on him, was

the doctor of whom Florence had once spoken to Wyvil. Mr. Joy had been a man of education, and in his youth had studied medicine, but having the misfortune to inherit a house and a few acres near Wingbourne, he abandoned his profession, and came to settle there, giving up all practice, except a little gratis among the poor ; but as he turned his attention towards doctoring his neighbour's cattle, he was generally considered by them more in the light of the veterinary surgeon than any other sort of doctor. He was a well-meaning, kind-hearted man, but being much poorer than Mr. Carslope, was too grateful for his repeated invitations to Wingbourne to risk his cordial reception there by any over display of refinement.

Mr. Carslope's other friends and boon companions were selected from the class of small farmers living near, amongst whom he was looked upon as a sort of magnate, and to whose level of decorum he always descended when practising the duties of hospitality. In

addition to these was his lawyer, an attorney who acted as agent for several other proprietors, a keen-sighted man, and a good judge, both of a glass of wine and of his own interests, on which account he never lost an opportunity of ingratiating himself by flattery with Mr. Carslope, and securing a frequent invitation to the Wingbourne table. These had formed Mr. Carslope's society for so long that he would have felt ill at ease with other guests.

There had been yet another break occasionally in the monotony of the life at Wingbourne, and it was when his jovial brother-in-law, Mr. Thurston, and a party of his equally jovial friends, had made Wingbourne their head quarters for a few days during the shooting season, —had drunk up the best wine and brandy stored in the cellars, lamed a horse now and then in riding steeple-chases, got up cock fights, and turned the house for the time being into a fair, where gamblers and sharpers of all kinds came and went

without challenge. Mr. Carslope disliked these days of roaring revelry, but he had not the energy to turn his unwelcome visitors out of the house, or even keep them in order; and the only mark of good sense he showed, was in commanding his daughter to keep out of hearing during the revels, an order she gladly obeyed, retreating to the unused and old wing of the house, and listening to the far-off sound of the orgies with trembling and disgust. Mr. Thurston's death had relieved the master of Wingbourne from this worst sort of companionship, but he still continued to assemble his more soberly, convivial circle, who, if they could not refine, could not do much to degrade him, and when they were not forthcoming, sipped and smoked by himself, or in company with his nephew, Godfrey Thurston.

This young man was not so bad as his father's associates were ready to make him. Though long accustomed unhappily to deep drinking, his nature was neither coarse

nor his instincts very degraded. He drank because it was his habit to do so—because he had never met on familiar terms anyone who was not nearly as great a toper as himself, and he saw no harm in it, though it is doubtful that if he had recognised the evil of the practice, he had sufficient self-command to resist the temptation. But this besetting sin and, when intoxicated, fits of fierce anger, were his only active vices. His temper was naturally kindly and affectionate, and he loved his pretty cousin Florence with a devoted and unswerving affection, which had done more to reconcile her to her future lot than all her father's arguments. His love had no reservation in it; he would have risked his life to please her, or (nearly as hard) endeavoured to acquire the deportment of a gentleman, if she had asked him; and, except in his rare hurricanes of passion, she had power to do with him as she pleased. Neither was he exacting in return; he came to her side sometimes to ask her with a look of dull, confiding wist-

fulness, whether she cared much about him, and when she laughed and answered in the affirmative, he went away fully as satisfied as her dog Syphax at receiving a caress. Florence was his earthly divinity, and as her refinement was the highest that he knew, he appreciated her accordingly.

To a certain degree Florence reciprocated his affection. He was never rough, and seldom ill-mannered towards her, and she felt for him a warm, unvarying kindness, mingled with a sense of superiority, which, as he always acknowledged it, rather knit them together than estranged them. She identified herself with his interests, resented his injuries, and would have waged battle on his behalf with any one who presumed to pass censure on his shortcomings; and yet she felt painfully conscious that there was something wanting in him. She compared him with the only other man who claimed kindred with her, Ellerslie, and in every point Godfrey was markedly inferior. Ellerslie, with his easy

manners and absence of self-consciousness, approached nearer than any one else she had seen to her idea of a gentleman, to the type which she had met in her books; when he talked he interested and amused her, whereas Godfrey's presence was often wearisome, so that she felt occasionally dull or out of spirits, she avoided his society, knowing that he could do nothing to enliven her.

Still, though sensible of his faults, her prospect in marriage had never cost her much painful anticipation. Though not altogether content, she had never looked forward to any brighter future; she liked her cousin too well to wish to pain him, and could she have stipulated to remain all her life as they now were, and postponed the marriage indefinitely, she would never have asked for any more exciting lot. She had asked for such a postponement the year before, which Godfrey had unhesitatingly accorded, and Mr. Carslope also, after somewhat anxiously hoping that she did not wish to break it off altogether.

"Oh, no," said Florence; "only I want things to remain as they are for another year;" and she had her wish.

But after Antony Wyvil had become an inmate of Wingbourne, poor Florence's heart no longer beat so placidly. Here at last was some one besides Ellerslie who was Godfrey's superior; who, though little more than young Thurston's contemporary in age, possessed all the advantages of education, intellect, and manner which he so glaringly lacked. She had never felt so dissatisfied with her destiny as now, and Godfrey had never been so wearisome to her. She acknowledged this dissatisfaction in secret to herself, though for that very reason she would have been more prompt than ever to stand on the defensive had anyone spoken slightingly of him. But after Ellerslie's departure there was no one to quarrel with Godfrey or cast sneers at his dullness and incapacity; Wyvil would have considered it dishonourable to do so, and Florence's partisanship not being awakened,

she was at leisure to make her reflections to herself all the keener. The contemplation of her future life presented an image of privation and weariness to her, and she tried hard to banish it from her mind, and to enjoy to its utmost the present pleasure of having a friend who neither smoked nor drank, who would talk to her of what the world outside their quiet valley was doing and thinking and writing, and yet who did not, like Ellerslie, quarrel with Godfrey on every occasion. She basked in the present sunny hours, her mind invigorated and soothed by this new intercourse, as a person's lungs, long choked and oppressed in a dense fog, expand under a warm south wind. She tried to forget that this pleasant visitor must ever leave them, and succeeded so well, that the fortnight succeeding Ellerslie's departure was one of almost unalloyed happiness.

For Wyvil, although he had long since come to the melancholy conviction that Mr. Carslope was quite sincere in wishing his

daughter to marry Godfrey, still lingered on at Wingbourne. The old gentleman, as if to convince him further of the hopelessness of his attachment, lost few opportunities of alluding to the coming match, and pluming himself upon the admirable arrangement by which both the grandchildren of the old Mr. Ellerslie would equally enjoy the estate. He talked of the wedding as settled to take place at the end of the harvest, and yet Antony was still unable to fix the day for his departure. With all our belief that man is an independent moral agent there are times in life, and they occur frequently from twenty to twenty-five, when we acknowledge that destiny is very strong upon us, and that the free will we boast of and cling to has resolved itself into very narrow limits. To go or to stay—to put temptation out of our way or to yield to it, is in such cases all the choice we have left;—a middle course is beyond our power.

Every evening, when he felt that the last day had opened some fresh source of sympathy

between himself and Florence, when he had felt the spell stronger upon him, had wished more impatiently for Godfrey's absence, and thought the most despairingly about the coming sacrifice, he resolved that he must go, before more irreparable mischief was done; and yet every morning found him animated with fresh courage, determined to act only as the sedate and prudent friend, to avoid all attempt to win her affections, but to spend at least one day longer in her company. And at such times he questioned strongly whether Mr. Carslope had so great a claim on his deference that he was bound to respect his wishes, and accept the fiat that Florence's destiny was fixed beyond recall. Would it be so impossible or so dishonourable to teach a girl, if she once began to love him, that her will might be independent of her father's ?

He spoke to her one day of his proximate departure without assigning the real reason for it, and she answered in a disappointed tone,

"My father thought you would stay here with us all the summer. Are you obliged to begin your studies so soon?"

"Not exactly my studies; but I wanted to travel— to see more of my native country. In short, I am a stranger here."

"Father would be very sorry that you should feel yourself one," said Florence, eagerly. "Your companionship gives him more pleasure than that of anyone else who comes near the house. I hope you will not leave us on that account. He considers you quite an old friend. I think if you were to stay he would begin to care again for all his old pursuits."

"Hardly, unless his present state of health should mend," said Antony, flattered, in spite of all his wise resolves, by the tone of manifest interest in which she spoke; but his pleasure received a cruel shock when she continued, rather timidly,

"I think your society is so useful to Godfrey, also. My father has always said it would

be so good for him to have some friends among his equals."

"I don't think Mr. Thurston would be likely to pay much attention to the advice of one so little his elder," replied Wyvil, much mortified, but very anxious that she should not see he was.

"Ah, he would pay attention to you. If Ellerslie had chosen to be more friendly with us, he could have been of such use to Godfrey; for you must have seen," she added, hesitating, and blushing rather painfully, "that in some things he is not quite the same as other gentlemen. If he had been to college, it would have been so different."

Antony made no reply. In his own heart he thought of the proverb about a silk purse, and doubted whether Mr. Godfrey Thurston had ever had the materials of a gentleman in him. Florence waited for him to speak, but as he did not, she continued with some embarrassment,

"If we must lose you, and you are going,

would it be very irksome to you to let Godfrey travel with you? My father has often said it would be so useful to him to see the world a little, but none of our friends are the sort he ought to go with. Father has long intended to speak to you of the plan, but I thought you might more willingly agree to it as a favour to me."

"I would do more than that with such a motive," said Wyvil, eagerly, but finding he was getting on dangerous ground, he checked himself.

"I am afraid he will be at first rather in your way," pursued Florence; "but as you know him more, you will like him. He has such a kind heart, and that is the most necessary part of all in the making of a gentleman, is it not?"

"It is an essential part, certainly," said Wyvil, hesitatingly, "but there is a great deal more. You will not mind my telling you, Miss Carslope, that your cousin has much, very much to learn, before he could mingle

with educated men of his own rank on terms of equality."

"I know it," said Florence, sorrowfully, "I have often felt it, and Ellerslie frequently says so; but I do not mind *your* telling me. You do not seem to despise him for it as Ellerslie does. I know he is different to other gentlemen, who can live in London, and travel, and read, but he will have a large estate to keep him occupied and happy, and I am sure he will make his tenants happy. Father has often said that Wingbourne could not be in better hands than Godfrey's."

There was a pause, and they walked on in silence. Florence seemed dejected, and Antony's next speech stuck in his throat, and it was with some difficulty that he stammered forth at last,

"Have I not understood that your marriage was to be in September?"

Florence's face fell.

"So we think," she answered, and taking advantage of a plot of carnations which were

straggling confusedly across the gravel walk, she knelt down to tie them up, turning, as she did so, her face quite away from Wyvil. "My father thought September was the best time," she continued, in a constrained tone; "but it is not settled. Anything may put it off a little later."

"You are aware," said Antony, hastily, "that there is no law which gives a father the power to marry his daughter to whom she does not like. You know, of course, you are quite free to consult your own inclinations. Your fate is in your own hands. You are quite free to refuse. Your father cannot force—"

Florence dropped her carnations, and rising, looked at him with a flushed, eager face.

"What do you mean, Mr. Wyvil? I know I'm free. My father would not form a wish that was against mine, but my choice is the same as his, and never can be altered."

"Never, Florence? are you certain of that?" exclaimed Wyvil, and abandoning all his pru-

dence and all his resolves, and (at another time he would have said) all his honourable scruples, he took her hand and was about to pour forth all the passion he could no longer master. But his opportunity was gone. Florence heard her name called loudly from the house, and glad of an excuse to escape from a scene which, though she did not know what he was about to say, was beginning strongly to embarrass her, she snatched away her hand, and fled swiftly up the trellised alley towards the house.

Wyvil's first impulse was to pursue her and implore her to listen to him, but cooler reflection told him that it was a fortunate thing they had been interrupted, before he had further played the fool. She had already given him to understand that she fully acquiesced in her father's choice, and was not inclined to alter, and if he were still to remain in the house, it was better for both that he should not abandon the character of the cool-headed friend he had hitherto played.

But he was not sure that he would remain. What motive had he to stay when she had given him so distinctly to understand she liked Godfrey for his own sake? It would be better in many respects that he left Wingbourne; not burdened with the society of the irredeemable Godfrey, whose companionship would be almost enough to forfeit for himself too the caste of a gentleman. It was no concern of his if the future owner of Wingbourne were a boor instead of a man of refinement; and thinking thus, Wyvil came to the conclusion it would be better for him to leave the house the next day.

He proceeded slowly and thoughtfully to the house, intending to seek Mr. Carslope at once, and inform him of the speedy termination to his visit; but on reaching the stone portico his attention was diverted, for a horseman had just dismounted there, and he found his hand shaken by Ellerslie.

CHAPTER VII.

RES ANGUSTA DOMI.

Ellerslie had returned to his lonely farm-house in not the happiest frame of mind imaginable. The small freehold which he called his own, was situated twenty miles from Wingbourne, and was still more isolated from civilization, lying high and cold on a bleak hill-side. The habitation was little larger than a cottage, built of roughly-hewn blocks of stone, a neat, but very bare garden before it, and a few slanting, storm-

bent trees behind; it was destitute of any beauty, unless it might be the poetry of desolation. In winter, the heavy snows blocked up the path to the nearest village for days together, quite preventing the passage of even the country letter-carrier, the only one who made it a daily business to climb to that barren spot, and even in summer the wind whistled shrilly round the corners of the house. The flock of sheep that fed on the farm were some of the most active, though not the fattest in the country round, and the same might be said of the cattle. The crops were generally stunted, and often were hardly carried before the autumn snows came on. Farming, which in other situations is a pleasant, though not a profitable occupation, had brought to Ellerslie neither profit nor pleasure; and, weary and disgusted with its daily round of petty disappointments and shortcomings, he often wished he had abandoned it for the arduous but more inspiring toil of a profession, ten years ago, when he

would not have fought the battle of life against younger men at so much disadvantage as now.

For Ellerslie had never been able to reconcile himself to the poverty in which the greater part of his life had been passed. The injudicious fondness of the former proprietor of the Wingbourne, or as it was sometimes called the Ellerslie, estate, had aroused expectations in the lad of ten or twelve years old which had been cruelly disappointed by the legacy of only a hundred pounds — expectations which made him look upon the two daughters of his old relation as usurpers of a right which ought to have been his. His pride, and the constant hope that some unforseen chance would still cause Wingbourne to revert to him, had prevented his trying to win his fortune elsewhere, and had kept him, not indeed contented, but enchained to the few barren acres which formed his patrimony.

Ellerslie possessed very different tastes to

the present master of Wingbourne. Though like him disinclined to the steady plodding life of the country gentleman and farmer, that disinclination arose not from any want but excess of energy in him. A soldier's life would have suited him; the "nightly ambuscade" and the "daily harass," would have made him as nearly contented as one of his temperament ever could be made. He was ambitious to be known, to be occupied honourably and successfully. Friends he had none, and but little society; the restricted country circles within his reach could not satisfy his need of acquaintance. Nor was he on good terms with many of them. Though he had a cursory acquaintance with most of the wealthy gentry near, who could not forget that the Ellerslies had once been one of their best families, he seldom accepted their hospitality, because his limited means could not suffer him to return it; while on the other hand he never tolerated in his own cottage the set of men who formed Mr. Carslope's

delight, preferring rather to talk with any one of his day labourers than with the beer drinking, illiterate farmers, most of whom were his equals or superiors in fortune. By them he was called haughty, and disliked as such, and he gave himself no trouble to merit their good opinion.

But away from his own barren hillside of Llanfydd, Ellerslie had more connection with the outer, and even the London world, than Mr. Carslope had ever cared to possess. In years when the farm affairs had proved favourable, or his economies had reached a sufficient sum, he left Llanfydd for London, Edinburgh, and sometimes the continent, and for a few months did all in his power to forget there existed such a place as that lonely farmstead. Though his temper was too reserved to make friendships, he had at least in his sojourns in great cities formed a greater variety of acquaintance than his Wingbourne relations had ever imagined to exist.

But these excursions, though they soothed

for the time his restless discontent, only made him more dissatisfied on returning to a home which had never possessed any home charm for him. He tried to fill up the void which his farming concerns could not satisfy, by ordering books and newspapers to the utmost limit of his slender finances; but these failed to supply the want of human companionship, and ennui sometimes drove him to Wingbourne, from which he always returned irritable and envious, and more rebellious than ever against the fate which had given what once had promised fair to be his inheritance, into the hands of those who knew so little how to make a worthy use of it. When he was thought the most self-sufficient by his neighbours, he was in reality only the most discontented. Restless, dissatisfied with his fortunes because they were so far from brilliant, and with himself because he had made no successful effort to mend them, and loving no one person or thing enough to draw his thoughts from his own life—bitter with

himself, and sarcastic towards others, Ellerslie's existence had thus dragged on till his last visit to Wingbourne.

But that one week had wrought a change. He had found some one to admire; a treasure that was not and should not be so far beyond his reach as everything else he had cared about, and whose possession would bring with it many of those other advantages he had so long lacked. Six months ago, when he had last seen Florence, he had thought her a pretty, but not otherwise interesting, girl; he had then just returned from a journey, in which he had been meeting various literary people, and his head was occupied with far other matters than his young cousin. Either his six months' seclusion from any congenial faces had caused him to be less fastidious than was his wont, or the novelty of their meeting in the dusk on the lonely road, and his subsequent guiding her to a place of safety, had caused him to pay her greater attention, or finally the ill-repressed

admiration of Antony Wyvil for the young lady of Wingbourne had opened his eyes to the fact that she was beautiful and graceful; however the spark was first kindled, his admiration of her soon grew into a flame, and a fresh excitement, of which he had heretofore known nothing, was added to his life. He blamed himself for having overlooked her so long. The knowledge of her engagement with Godfrey, an engagement which had existed during half their young lives, and which had proved so strong an obstacle to Antony's attachment, added force to Ellerslie's liking. He had always been far more jealous of Godfrey's claims than of Mr. Carslope's or his daughter's; always disposed to sneer at his short-comings and to irritate him into expressions of open dislike, and the idea of depriving him of his promised bride, and with her of the estate, was perhaps the motive which turned passing fancy into a fixed intention. At first only: two or three days more spent with Florence had confirmed his

admiration for her so strongly that jealousy or pique formed but a small part of his motives, and he found himself even becoming more indifferent to the fact of her wealth, and thinking less of it and more of her than he could have supposed possible a year ago. Like many men who have put off loving anything better than themselves till youth is past, Ellerslie, at thirty-five, was far more headstrong in his passion than as a younger man he would have been, and he only quitted her because he foresaw that, after his last quarrel with Godfrey, a short absence was necessary to their further amicable intercourse.

But the solitude of his lonely farm house proved more then ever oppressive to him—the occupations he found waiting for him on his return more than ever irksome. The country folk had been accustomed to come to him to adjust their slighter differences, and though not possessing the legal power of a magistrate, he had nearly the authority of

one. One of these cases was awaiting his arbitration when he returned; but he went through the business impatiently and wearily, glad when he had dismissed the uninteresting faces, and was again alone. But solitude brought no distraction to him; the week's papers were lying ready for him to open them, and a new work he had ordered from London, placed carefully aside of them by his housekeeper, who greatly venerated her master's acquirements; but as he tore off the covers and cut the leaves, he glanced listlessly at the matter between them. His thoughts all the while were straying to Wingbourne and to Florence, and to the other individuals there who might influence her fate. Of Wyvil he was not jealous—he had no idea he felt more than a passing admiration for her, and he believed his stay there would be but short; but of Godfrey and Mr. Carslope he thought much.

In a few more days a heavy rain set in,

rendering his abode at the cottage still less to his taste. Not that the heaviest downfall kept him within doors. He strode about as usual over his barren acres, looking, with a disgust he took no effort to conquer, at the ripening corn lodged and beaten down by the descending showers; but the rain served to make the desolate country still more unlovely to his eyes, and by the time he had been a fortnight at Llanfydd, the impulse to leave it and betake himself again to Wingbourne was too strong to be resisted. He ordered his horse, told the housekeeper he should probably be absent again a week, and while the last showers still drizzled around him, and every tree under which he passed shook down its rain-drops above his head, he rode slowly down the mountain.

Not, however, in the straight route for Wingbourne. He turned his bridle towards a valley lying on the other side of his farm, and after he had ridden some ten miles, drew up before the door of a cottage, not indeed

much smaller or more solitary than his own, but in worse repair, and without those signs of care and neatness which, poor as it was, marked Llanfydd for a gentleman's habitation. He did not dismount, but called to one of the shock-headed, rosy children who were playing near the door, and told him to run and call his mother, and when the woman came curtseying to the door of the cottage, he said,

"Good-day, Mrs. Evans. How is your lodger to day? Thank you, I can't come in."

"She's better, sir, rather, thank you," was the answer. "It's one of her good days. She's sitting up and teaching my Jenny to sew. Will you not like to see her, sir?"

"I have not time to-day. Will you give her this parcel? It is some finer worsted for her knitting; my housekeeper got it for her."

"Won't you give it her yourself, sir? She'll be so much obliged. She says you are always thinking of her. Are you sure you won't come in?"

"Not to-day," said Ellerslie, and he rode away, muttering to himself,

"They say one good turn deserves another. It may be so, but I'm sure I don't see how picking up that poor creature when she had fallen over the quarry, so many years ago, and paying her lodging here since, is likely to turn to my profit. If it were not for that lad, then indeed—but as it is, I must make a shorter way out of my difficulty."

When Ellerslie arrived at Wingbourne he was surprised to find Wyvil still an inmate, but as he had not yet learned to fear him as a rival, he greeted him very cordially. Then without entering the house he inquired where Godfrey was, and, on hearing that he had just gone to his hunter's stable to inspect his condition, he followed him there, begging Antony to let Mr. Carslope know he should be with him in a quarter of an hour.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROAD TO RUIN.

ELLERSLIE'S present object was, if possible, to sow disunion between Florence and her affianced lover. If he could render her less content with Godfrey, and arouse in her a desire to be free from her engagement, he believed that he might easily induce Mr. Carslope to change his purpose and use his influence over his daughter on his (Ellerslie's) behalf; nor did he think it difficult, that en-

gagement once broken, to win her liking for himself. He had sufficient confidence in his own power to believe that if he really tried to please—a thing he had never attempted yet at Wingbourne—he could not fail of attaining his object.

The meeting between Ellerslie and Godfrey was not more defiant than usual. On the contrary, the former threw into his manner a heartiness of cordiality which came very flatteringly from a man who treated so few as if they were his equals, and which insensibly modified Godfrey's dislike of him. Godfrey had but a vague idea of the cause of their last quarrel, as everyone at Wingbourne had since carefully avoided alluding to it; and though he remembered his overthrow and had felt very bitter towards Ellerslie in consequence, his anger faded away before Ellerslie's genial friendliness.

"Why are you not always like what you are now?" he said, after this soothing cordial had been applied for ten minutes. "You can

be a good tempered fellow when you choose. Why are not you so always?"

"Because I am sometimes out of humour," said Ellerslie, frankly; "and if you lived in my solitary house at Llanfydd, all alone as I do, you would be out of humour more than occasionally, I can tell you."

"But why do you live alone?" said Godfrey. "I hear on all hands what an unsocial fellow you are. Why don't you have your friends up there now and then, and have a jolly time? I would, I know, if I was independent, as you are."

"Independent!" said Ellerslie, bitterly. "You need never know how little such independence as mine is worth the independence of a Carthusian friar. But talking of unsociability, Godfrey," he added, more gaily, "it is you who eschew your friends, not I. Have you forgotten that to-day and to-morrow are Marchbury fair, and you were to be there?"

Marchbury was the nearest market town,

about twelve miles off, and it was a favourite resort of young Thurston on such occasions. He answered slowly, and with a touch of regret that did not escape Ellerslie,

"I did remember it partly, but I promised Flo' I'd take her to see the Rhysdale woods this afternoon, as the rain was over. I should like to go to Marchbury, but I can't disappoint Flo'."

"Any day would suit Florence equally, I should imagine," said Ellerslie, "and I know myself that you promised Wheeler to be there."

"I don't like Joe Wheeler," said Godfrey, after a few moments of reflection, which his kinsman hoped had been employed in considering how he should put off Florence.

"Neither do I, but that is not the question. I do not think that Joe Wheeler likes you; at least, I have heard him speak of you as no friend should of another."

"What have you heard him say of me?" asked Godfrey, fiercely. "The devil! Eller-

slie, I'll not have these hints. You shall tell tell me!"

"I have no objection—Joe Wheeler is no friend of mine. I have heard him sneer and laugh at you, saying that you had not the making of a good companion in you, like your father, and that it was no good for you to try to be gentlemanlike, for that you grew quarrelsome if you tried to carry more drink than a child could manage. He says you are afraid to meet him after disgracing yourself as you did at Marchbury last year, and that you owed him money at the cock fight, which he should come upon your uncle to pay if you did not win it back this time."

Godfrey stamped furiously, as Ellerslie deliberately uttered the latter part of this speech, of most of which Mr. Wheeler had been innocent, and when he finished, Godfrey swore at him for a cold blooded friend who had heard such slanders and not refuted them by knocking Joe Wheeler down.

"I don't quarrel with such as he," said

Ellerslie. "But all things considered, I think you had better go to Marchbury, this afternoon, and show him you are not afraid to meet him."

"Who said I was afraid?" exclaimed Godfrey, thoroughly excited. "I'll go this very minute. I believe you do wish us well, Ellerslie, though you have an odd way of showing it. If I had heard Wheeler say such things of you, I'd have taught him better, I know--we are cousins after all. Come with me to Marchbury. What! ridden thirty miles already, and tired? You have not the spirit of a man in you. I'll be off this minute. I'll not take this poor beast with me, though," he added, patting the hunter's neck fondly, "for the roads are broken up between here and Marchbury, and it's sorry stabling they give it at the Red Lion. I'll saddle the black myself."

"And I will make your excuses to your uncle," said Ellerslie. "Is there anything I can get you from the house?"

"My spurs," said Godfrey, who had opened another stable-door, and had already led out the horse he had mentioned, "and my purse; there's the key of the desk in my room," he added, tossing it.

"All right," said Ellerslie, as he caught the key, and he left the yard by one gate as Florence entered it by another.

Some suspicion that all was not right must have crossed her mind, for there was an uneasy inflexion in her voice as she called out,

"Godfrey, where are you? Are you ready for our ride?"

"I'm not going, Flo'," said the young man, leading forward the black horse, which was now fully accoutred. "It's the day for Marchbury fair, and I'm going there. I ought to have been off two hours ago. You will not mind waiting one day for the ride, Flo'?"

"Never mind the ride," said Florence, "but oh! Godfrey, don't go to Marchbury fair. Remember the last time you were there,

—and you promised me after that, you would never go again."

"And I'll keep my word another time, Flo'," said her lover, "but I'm bound to go, to-day."

Florence laid her hand coaxingly on his arm. "You will not, if I ask you to give it up, Godfrey. It is, you know it is, much better to stay away."

"I don't see that, Flo' darling, and there's a man there, whom I want very much to meet."

"Well, then, I don't ask you to say it is better to stay, or to stop, because you promised me last year, but do stop because I ask just now. Godfrey, you would not make me unhappy, would you? I shall never be able to thank you enough if you will stay at home to-day for my sake."

Godfrey stood irresolute, but the pleading eloquence of her eyes, and a few more words from her sweet voice, conquered him. He

loosed his hold of the bridle, threw his arm round her, kissed her, and told her with complete sincerity that he never wished to do anything in his life to trouble her. They would go their ride together, he added, and leave Ellerslie and Mr. Wyvil to entertain each other at home.

It was the first intimation Florence had had that Ellerslie had come, and it did not please her. It added, however, another reason to her wish to secure Godfrey for the two or three hours of her ride. She begged him to order her horse at once, and hurried off to dress, and in a few minutes Ellerslie, who had timed his absence so as not to meet her, was again in the stable-yard.

"There is your purse," he said, "and your spurs. You must make haste if you mean to reach Marchbury before the rain comes on."

"I am not going," said Godfrey, regretfully.

Ellerslie smiled. "Not going? You have

thought better about meeting Wheeler. Well, I can hardly blame you for it."

"Not for that reason," said his victim, resentfully. "Flo' has begged me not go, so I shall stay."

"Another time Flo' had better mind her own affairs!" said Ellerslie, mimicking his assent, "Seriously, Thurston, I thought you were too sensible to go through life tied to a woman's apron string. If she assumes this power before she is married, I pity you afterwards. How far do you mean to let her have her own way?"

"In all she likes," answered Godfrey, angrily. "Don't talk to me, Ellerslie, I am sorry enough not to go, but she wished it, and I'll not say no to her."

"And she will wish you, I suppose, to forswear Wheeler and all your father's friends," laughed Ellerslie, mockingly, "and to give up wine altogether. Are you turned teetotaller yet, Thurston? And she will take you to church regularly on the Sunday to be

sermonized. You are a fortunate man, Godfrey Thurston; I never envied you so much as I do now." Then, changing his tone, he added; "If you don't wish to be made a fool of all your life, now is the time to assert your own wishes. Florence is a silly girl to ask you to give up going to Marchbury. You will be the only one in the country round who fails."

"It is quite true," said Godfrey, already yielding, "and I might please Flo' in another way by going and taking care of myself, you know."

"Of course, there is no virtue in shunning temptation altogether," said his evil genius. "I will explain to Florence why you have changed your mind; I have already told Mr. Carslope you are going. Make haste, it will rain."

"I could not go the ride with Flo' if it did rain, could I? She will not be disappointed," said Godfrey, still lingering with one hand on the saddle. Ellerslie's patience began to give way, but he curbed his irritation.

"Certainly not; she could not expect you to stay. You might have been half way to Marchbury by this time. That's right," for Godfrey now vaulted into the saddle, "give my respects to Wheeler and Co., and a fair sport to you all," and then as the young man cantered out of the yard, he muttered: "The hardest work I have had yet. Was it worth while to take the trouble to send him there, only for the sake of having till to-morrow evening alone with Florence? Pshaw! the lad runs of his own accord to ruin."

He was startled by receiving an imperative tap on his shoulder. It was Florence, who, fully equipped for the ride, was standing aside him.

"Where is Godfrey, Cousin Ellerslie?" she said, angrily. "Where has he gone? Why have you come here and sent him away, out of my sight and care?"

Her eyes were bright with anger, her cheeks flushed, and her slender figure drawn

up to its full height. Ellerslie thought he had never seen her look so beautiful, and it was full a minute before he recollected himself enough to reply,

"He had a pre-engagement at Marchbury."

"At Marchbury! And you sent him there! I know you must have done, for he had just promised me he would stay. Ellerslie! Ellerslie! was this fair? Was it manly to send him to meet such associates? To make him break his word—to lead him to his ruin? And you so much older, who ought to help me to save him,—when you know what will be the consequences of sending him there!"

"Godfrey Thurston is his own master, my dear cousin. I am not responsible for his conduct."

"You would say the same if you gave a child a knife," interrupted Florence, bitterly. "You would see it cut off its hand and say it was no concern of yours. You know that this

drinking will ruin his health—will kill him sooner or later."

"Kill him? You could kill a horse sooner," said Ellerslie. "It is men's brains that kill them, child; Godfrey will outlive you or me either. But you are unjust to charge me with driving him to his ruin. He inherits all his father's propensities; they broke his mother's heart—Godfrey will break yours if you marry him. You hope to influence and alter him. What does your influence amount to? You can't prevent his daily making a brute of himself. He cares for you, I know, but after what fashion? You will find it out when it is too late, for neither I nor you, nor mortal power, can restrain a drunkard when he is once on the downward path."

Florence, who whilst he spoke had been nervously wringing her hands, and twisting and finally breaking to pieces the riding whip she held, now threw it down, and hid her face, bursting into a passion of tears. Eller-

she felt touched by her grief, and for the moment really sorry.

"Florence, dear Florence, you are a perfect child in these matters," he said. "You must have known all this already. Come, Godfrey is not worth so many tears. Besides, he will be back to-morrow, and very vexed with himself probably, and you will forgive him then, shall you not? as you have done already a dozen times. Come in; it is raining sharply. He may turn back at once, finding the road so bad; and, at any rate, your father will be wondering where you are."

Florence followed him to the house uneasily, speculating whether he had been accessory to Godfrey's change of resolution; she might have done him injustice, and Godfrey might all the time have intended to go. But no; she could not believe that when her cousin had kissed her, promising to stay, he had been guilty of deceit. She had never known him tell a lie; and yet, the unsteadi-

ness of purpose which it showed in him, to have been swayed so easily by Ellerslie, equally alarmed her. She was very angry still with Ellerslie, and hardly spoke to him the whole evening, so that he remained doubtful whether Godfrey's cause or his own had lost the most by his afternoon's strategy.

Mr. Carslope had four or five friends, of the class already specified, to dine with him that day. It was Wyvil's first introduction to them; and he could not help marvelling at the singular discrepancy between the old fashioned but still educated and gentlemanly demeanour of the host, and the coarse, illiterate, and unkempt appearance of the chief part of the guests. Cleanliness is next to godliness, and Mr. Carslope would have held that dressing for dinner was superior to either; but his friends were not so scrupulous; and with the exception of Mr. Joy, the village doctor, whom Antony had already seen and rather liked, there was not one of the guests who did not disgrace even the very

questionable decorum of the Wingbourne table, from which Florence made her escape, as soon as her duties, as mistress of the house, permitted.

Godfrey's absence was of course remarked; but excited no surprise, when they heard he had gone to Marchbury, Mr. Carslope observing that they had all been young once, and knew what young people liked. His guests followed his lead, adding, for Florence had by this time left the room, stories of their own youthful frolics, which made Ellerslie lean back in his chair in profound and haughty indifference, and Antony wonder that Mr. Carslope imposed no restraint. The doctor, Mr. Joy, appeared somewhat to sympathise with his impatience; but he was evidently too much in awe of his host to take any active part which might not meet his approbation; and turning to Wyvil, he began to talk hard and fast about the shooting to be expected in the course of another month.

"I am hardly likely to be here," said Wyvil, adding, with an involuntary glance round the circle, "the life here is very different to what I have been accustomed to lead."

"You allude to the drinking," said the veterinary surgeon, shaking his head. "I'm afraid it's not wholesome, carried to excess; but there is Scripture warranty for countenancing the use of the glass, in good season. 'Wine, that maketh glad the heart of man,' you know, and so forth."

"Nevertheless," said Wyvil, "I think, unless you wish for any more wine, the best thing you can do will be to accompany me to join Miss Carslope. I am going."

"With pleasure," said Mr. Joy, rising to his feet with alacrity. "Ah! Mr. Ellerslie has gone already; I had not noticed that. Let us join Miss Carslope by all means."

Mr. Carslope exclaimed at them for defaulters; but they made good their retreat, and he turned apologetically to his other guests.

"Antony Wyvil's easily beaten, though Joy's head generally stands it better; but what can you expect, when Ellerslie sets them the example of running away?"

"It is not Mr. Ellerslie's head that is in fault," said the agent; "but his pride. I'm astonished to see him here at all. What arts did you use to bring him, may I ask, sir?"

"I? none," said the master of Wingbourne. "He's welcome when he comes, but I never asked him here. He finds it dull at Llanfydd, I presume."

"Mr. Ellerslie is the proudest man in the county, and with the least to back it," said another of the guests; "though I ought not to say it, he being your cousin, Carslope."

"Oh, go on," said Mr. Carslope, laughing, for it never irked him to hear Ellerslie abused, having in his heart but little sympathy with him. "He is no cousin of mine—my wife was an Ellerslie; but I am none."

"Then you have no dislike, sir, to hearing what we think of him?" said the agent.

"None in the least—say what you like. All is fair play. Only pride is no fault; I like pride."

"Pride may be allowable with Wingbourne to back it," said the farmer who had before spoken. "I remember the time when there were seven carriages in the yards here, all of people staying in the house. The Ellerslies were a good family once; but now what are they?"

"Mr. Ellerslie declined to join the last committee-room dinner," said Mr. Solly, the agent, in a smooth voice. "Marchbury society is not select enough for him."

"And though you say you like pride, Carslope, would you like a neighbour of yours to meddle with your workmen, and plume himself upon giving better wages than yourself, as he has done to my knowledge with Ingoldsby, his nearest neighbour at Llanfydd?"

"And never to ask a friend to come and chat with him," subjoined another.

"Or drink with him—which is the worst?" said Mr. Carslope, gaily. "I give him up—I'm ashamed of him; but there's time for him to mend. Meanwhile, don't let us imitate his bad example. Solly, the bottle stands with you."

CHAPTER IX.

DECLARATION OF LOVE AND WAR.

Ellerslie tried hard the next day to get a private interview with Mr. Carslope, to sound him about his views for Florence and Godfrey; but for a long time without success. In the first place, the master of Wingbourne slept later than usual, after his revels; and secondly, as it was the last day of Wyvil's visit, and as the latter was anxious, for prudence sake, to see as little of Florence alone as possible, his time was passed chiefly in

his host's society. In the afternoon, however, Ellerslie obtained an opportunity.

"Where is Florence?" he asked, abruptly, on entering the drawing-room, and discovering Mr. Carslope dozing alone in his great arm-chair. It was wheeled up near the window, and the breath of the hot August day, heavy with the recent rain, and burdened with the scent of the tea roses, that clustered outside the casement, stole through the room. The sleeper lazily opened his eyes as the question was repeated.

"Gone out, I believe, to see if Godfrey is coming home," he said. "Why? do you want her?

"I don't want her, I want you," said Ellerslie, seating himself opposite Mr. Carslope, and fixing his keen dark eyes on him, to watch the effect of his communication. "Cousin Carslope, you are getting old—not old, I know, as years go; but your health is bad, and you might be called away suddenly."

"Do you think I'm looking ill?" interrupted Mr. Carslope, anxiously. "I have not felt well lately. I have thought of sending over to Marchbury for Dr. Gillman. Do not you think it would be prudent?"

"Send for whomever you like; but listen to what I have to say first. Have you ever thought of your daughter in the case of your death, and what protector you could leave her?"

"Well," said the master of Wingbourne, uneasily, "I have done so, I think, and the fittest there is. Next month, I expect the young people will make up their minds to be married."

"It was of that I came to speak to you," said Ellerslie. "Mr. Carslope, Florence will not make up her mind to be married—not, that is to say, that she will not obey you if you insist upon it, but her heart is not in that marriage. You speak of young Thurston as being the fittest protector you can find for your daughter. Look at him—what

is he? What qualities has he?—through his life long he must lean on some one else. He has no energy—no intellect; his very associates look down upon him. He will not even be able to manage this estate."

"There is Wallis to do that," said Mr. Carslope. "I am very well contented with Wallis."

"Wallis is old, and the best bailiff will get past work some time," rejoined Ellerslie, impatiently. "Then, with regard to her domestic happiness, do you think that Florence, even if she liked him now, will be contented, when every man she sees is superior to her husband. Do you want your daughter to break her heart, or see her exposed to ridicule, on account of the husband you have chosen for her?"

"You under-rate Godfrey, indeed you do, Ellerslie."

"I do not," said Ellerslie, emphatically—"I rate him at his true merit. He is a kind-hearted, easy-tempered fool. And now let

me tell you, Carslope, Florence does not love him, though she has persuaded herself to believe she does, and means to do her duty in obeying you; but she does not love him; and if you insist on this marriage, you will sacrifice your daughter more completely than if you took her life."

"What does all this lead to?" said Mr. Carslope, in a tone of querulous annoyance; "if Godfrey is not worthy of her, where am I to find a husband that is? I know no one who lives near us; I have no friend to consult. Last year, when she begged me to put it off, and I fancied she had no liking for Godfrey, I wrote to my old friend Richard Wyvil, the father of this young man—he was then in India, and as people from a distance often judge better than those close by, I asked him if I ought to send Godfrey to college, or buy him a commission in the army, as he was not just the thing, and a girl with Florence's expectations ought to have a gentleman for her husband; but my

letter could only just have reached him when he died. I had a great liking for Wyvil. But now comes the question, Ellerslie,—how am I to make Godfrey more suitable to her?"

"You cannot; that is the only answer to your question," said Ellerslie. "You can neither make him a fit husband for her, nor a fit master for the Ellerslie—for the Wingbourne estate, I should say," he added, hastily correcting himself. "Let us come to the point at once, Carslope; I love your daughter. Give her to me, or rather, give me your parental sanction to win her, and you will consult her true happiness in doing so."

Mr. Carslope very seldom gave himself the trouble of reasoning when there was anyone else to take the burden of thinking for him, but in the present instance Ellerslie had somewhat overshot the mark.

"Give her to you, cousin?" he said, while a languid contortion, half sneer, half smile, overspread his features; "I understand now

your depreciation of the poor lad. No, I'll not do him so much wrong as to take his bride away, and his chance of the estate, too. The Ellerslie estate! It is that in your estimation, cousin, is it? and you think you have the best right to it?"

"I have as much right to it as you," broke in Ellerslie, fiercely. "You seem to forget that I was at one time the old man's acknowledged heir."

"But not when he died," said Mr. Carslope; "it passed, as it ought to pass, to his daughter, my wife, and from her to her child." He broke off, suddenly meeting a keen questioning look on his cousin's part that effectually confused him. "You can't deny," he added, "that the grandchildren, Florence and Godfrey, have the most claim on the estate."

"Before mine?" said Ellerslie. "I assure you I have no intention to dispute it."

Mr. Carslope looked reassured, and in proportion as his spirits rose, his temper waxed hot.

"And yet you want to deprive Godfrey of the land, poor fellow. You have just discovered that Florence is an heiress, and this is the secret of your liking for her."

"My liking has nothing to do with the estate," answered Ellerslie. "That may go where it will—to Godfrey, or to young Wyvil, were that possible, for his father probably sent him here with the intention of securing it and your daughter, too. I care for Florence, quite independently of her wealth."

"I'll believe you to be quite as disinterested as you would wish to be thought," said Mr. Carslope, with a second languid sneer. "As for young Wyvil, the lad is too honourable to have thought of her after I warned him she was meant for another—land and herself as well—as indeed you know it is not in my power to separate them if I would. I'll do you all the justice you wish, Cousin Ellerslie, but I say again that Florence and her estate are both meant for her mother's nephew, and that had I ten other husbands

offered to choose from, I would not discard Godfrey. I'll not even think of doing him such injustice, and now you have my answer."

"An answer I shall not accept," said Ellerslie, in a suppressed tone of passion, while his face was pale with rage.

As he spoke, the door unclosed, and Florence's fair young head was pushed in through the opening.

"He has not come back, father," she said, without entering.

"Come in, my child, come in," cried Mr. Carslope. "Tell Ellerslie—it is right you should know what we have been talking about—tell Ellerslie, who has been modestly putting in a claim on you himself, that you will marry no one but Godfrey, and that you are putting no force on your inclinations when you agree to do so."

Florence flushed crimson, and then turned pale.

"A claim on me? Ellerslie?" she said.

"Yes," pursued her father, "he has been saying I ought to give you to him, and break my faith with Godfrey; turn him away from this house, which has been his home since he was born. Tell him, my darling, that you do not mean to change, and that you love, and will be faithful to your cousin."

Here Ellerslie, too angry to restrain himself longer, broke in,

"You do not love him, Florence!—you lie if you say you do! You cannot debase your own nature so far. Tell your father that you cannot obey him—that you will not at his command vow to love and honour a man who is nothing but a horse-jockey and a drunkard, and who will die in delirium, as his father did before him."

He had again gone too far in his headlong passion. Florence's breath came short and quick, and her cheeks had resumed more than their former brilliancy.

"If you want my answer," she exclaimed, "it is that I will never retract my word. I

will never be the means of breaking his heart, a far more faithful one than you believe. Did you think I was so false as to wish to be free, cousin? and for your sake!"

Ellerslie sprang towards her and snatched both her hands in his own, crushing them together with a force of which in his fury he was quite unconscious.

"You shall not marry him!—by God, I swear you shall not!" he cried, bending forward till his face was on a level with her own, and his eyes shot their burning glances right into hers. "He shall never have you! He or I will die sooner than he shall possess you!" and releasing her with a suddeness that made her totter backwards, he darted from the room and out of the house.

CHAPTER X.

RESCUE OR NO RESCUE.

THROUGH the gate and up the side of the hill, Ellerslie strode without pausing for a minute, or noticing which way he went in his blind rage and fury,—his blood was on fire at the insult he had received. To be refused, and in such accents of scorn, by both father and daughter, as if his wooing had been an act of the maddest presumption, stung his proud spirit to the quick. Florence, whom, notwithstanding her invariable defence of her

cousin, he had never believed to care for him, had openly avowed her preference for the lover chosen for her by her father, and plainly intimated that could she in any case have broken her engagement, it would not be for Ellerslie's sake; and Mr. Carslope, whom Ellerslie had believed to be so much under his influence that he could turn him which way he would, had proved restive, had slighted and scorned his offer, and accused him flatly of the most mercenary views. Against these two his anger raged at first, but it soon flowed into its usual channel, and directed itself with more than its usual fury upon the innocent cause of this contumely—Godfrey, whom he hated with all the intensity of his fierce, selfish nature.

For some wild moments his uppermost thought was to hurry to Marchbury, seek out Godfrey, insult him, quarrel with him, and provoke a fight which his own superior strength could decide but one way. Had he had a weapon with him Godfrey Thurston

would have had but a short lease of life; but those days were past when every gentleman went armed, though never in the fiercest days of feud and strife did a spirit breathe revenge more ardently than Ellerslie's now. It rendered him insensible for the time to every consideration of prudence or moderation, and he had already hastened two or three miles on the road in the direction of Marchbury before the madness of what he was about to do forced itself upon his mind, and made him recollect that if he would not be himself a lost man, Godfrey's life was beyond his reach.

He left the road as these reflections forced themselves upon him, and, leaping over the stone fence which bounded it, found himself upon the bare hill-side. But though he had compelled himself to turn aside from his headlong course, his mind was too convulsed with passion, though aware of its inutility, for him to reason upon what had passed, or that which remained for him to do. Already half

ashamed of the violent words his passion had seduced him into, he strove to work it off by extreme physical exertion. He climbed the steepest crags of the hill, scrambling up abrupt places, where the smoother earth had been washed away by the action of the rains, and the rough rock jutted out, and leaping over obstructions, which in a calmer moment he would have carefully avoided; but now he was only conscious of them enough to impel him to encounter them. He reached the topmost crag at last; and, so thoroughly tired out that he felt calmer already, he threw himself down on the ground, and gloomily watched the sun going down in the sky, still debating between the dictates of his anger and his prudence.

The latter triumphed, for Godfrey was beyond his power, unless he were so bent on his ruin as to choose his own self-destruction rather than forego it. Duels were not fought now-a-days, and, though in Thurston's next drunken fit it would be easy to provoke him

to fight, a blow with his bare hand was not dangerous, and the introduction of any other weapon would be sufficient to deprive the catastrophe of all appearance of accident. He could not injure him in any manner without injuring himself more, and though, in the heat of passion he had declared to Florence that life or death lay in the balance, now that his calmer self resumed its sway he felt conscious that that was but an empty threat. He foresaw that he must endure the insult and put up with the Carslopes' ridicule as an extravagant boaster, and a ruffianly fool,—smile and appear on the same amicable terms with them if he meant to return to Wingbourne, supposing indeed that after having parted with them in such a manner, they should permit him to re-enter the house. Would it not be better, he questioned within himself, rather than endure the ignominy of seeming to implore their friendship, to leave them for ever, sell his scanty patrimony, and seek his fortune elsewhere? He ought to have done it

years ago, but it was not yet too late for a man of energy to fight the uphill battle of life.

The sun went down amidst clouds of fire, and the twilight began to deepen, before Ellerslie rose and began to descend the mountain, feeling tired in frame and spirit. He took the direction of Wingbourne, not that he meant to encounter again its inmates, but because his horse, without which he could not reach Llanfydd, was stabled there, and he wished to saddle him and ride off unperceived. He had come to no decision respecting his future conduct; his thirst for revenge was as deep as before, but the violence of his resentment had brought its own exhaustion with it, and he could neither think nor plot further. Mechanically now he avoided the hollows and rocks he had before courted, but though walking far more slowly than on setting out, the descent made his progress so much easier that it was not long before he was in sight of the river which crossed the

direct road between Wingbourne and the market town, and the planks which, after the destruction of the bridge, formed the only means of crossing it.

He must have passed along this plank four or five hours before, though, preoccupied and angry, he had at the time been unconscious of doing so; but now as he descended the steep and slippery bank towards it, he paused and hesitated to recross it. The stream, swollen by the late rains, and particularly by the torrent which had fallen the night before, rushed impetuously along, in a turbid seething current, and had risen so high as almost to undermine the block of stone on which one end of the beams rested. The water shot past only a few inches beneath it, bearing along at times branches and the trunks of small trees, which as they struck against the plank shook it violently, and often threatened to carry it away with them.

Ellerslie had been heedless of the danger when he crossed the river before, and hardly

remembered he had done so, but now in the gathering darkness, with his head cooled and his nerves somewhat shaken, he felt doubtful whether he could accomplish the crossing. He did not hesitate long before attempting it, but ere he had made many steps the unsteady quivering of the plank, the gleaming water before his eyes, and the consciousness that if he did make a false step he should have a hard struggle for life, being no great swimmer, made him stop and retrace his path; and his heart beat faster when he regained the bank, determined to go the four miles which must intervene before he came to another bridge, rather than again try that perilous passage.

He had hardly climbed to the top of the bank again when he heard, striking sharp and loud even on the muddy road, the tramp of a horse urged at a hand gallop, and presently the beast and its rider loomed up into view through the gloom. It was their evident intention to cross the river, and Ellerslie, as the man pulled up his horse with a sharp jerk on

the top of the bank, and threw his leg over the saddle to dismount, was about to come forward and warn him of the height of the water, and the unlikelihood that in the dark he would be able to cross in safety. But before he had made one step from under the tall tree beneath which he happened to be standing, and which cast his person into additional obscurity, the broken fragments of some verses the stranger was singing reached his ear. It was Godfrey's full and sonorous voice gaily humming over the tune he had left his boon companions singing at the tavern, and it was rolled out in a manner which left no doubt of the confused state of his intellects. His unsteady gait, too, as he led the horse slowly down the bank showed very plainly his condition.

"So, ho, steady, boy; what are you shieing at?" he said, patting its head. "'Tis a jolly good life! Come on; steady there, now."

Ellerslie stood still as it turned into stone. The man against whom he had that day

uttered so many vows of vengeance was before him, and was proceeding heedlessly towards the ruin he had been so powerless to inflict. The plank bridge, dangerous to-night for any man whose eyes were not the keenest or nerves the steadiest, was impassible to Thurston's confused head and unsteady footing. He was walking ignorantly to his death, inevitably, irremediably, and Ellerslie watched him with an exultation he could not master. The words of warning froze on his lips. It was Providence itself, he said, that was working to this end. It was no doing of his if the drunken man were drowned, if his rival were swept utterly from his path. He might have been miles away by this time, and Godfrey would as infallibly have been drowned; it was a mere chance which had led him to witness it. One wild thought of Florence filled his mind —Florence and Wingbourne. How easy it would now be to obtain her! How plain and smooth his future course. Godfrey's destruction, which for many years he had been wish-

ing for, and this afternoon scheming how to compass, was lying in wait for him now—a few steps more, and he must totter and fall, and be lost,—his youth, his strength, his friends, his fair future of no avail as he should struggle helplessly in the torrent.

And Ellerslie knew that he might yet save him by a word ; he set his teeth firmly, resolved that that word should not escape him, and, striding rapidly away, he hurried up the road away from the bridge, aware that his rival must even now be venturing upon the treacherous footing. And as he went, he stifled the pleadings of the faint conscience which was all a life of selfish calculation had left him, by muttering—"The fool would not listen to me if I did try to save him."

But before he had gone twenty yards, a cry which thrilled to his heart, almost stopping the current of his blood, burst up from the river ; a cry of fear and terror, a shout for assistance. It was all over! and with the thought a rush of remorse stronger even than

his previous hatred shot through him. The full horror of what he had done came over him, and he turned and bounded back to the river as desperately bent to save as during that afternoon he had been to destroy. For one instant he paused by the side of the rushing flood to see if his help could avail. Close before him was the struggling, plunging horse, endeavouring to climb up the steep muddy bank, and falling over in the attempt; but the now panting cries for help came further off, and through the dusk he fancied he could see a dark object like a human head drifting down the stream. For the time being his human instincts had swept away the cold calculating sophisms that had kept his tongue silent five minutes before. He paused not a moment to think on the risk he was encountering, on the slender chance there was that he could rescue the drowning man, but throwing off his coat, and shouting at the fullest pitch of his voice a cry of encouragement, he dashed into the river, and was, in a moment, out of

his depth, and struggling with the swollen current.

The stream, aided by his own strokes, swept him rapidly down, and he looked eagerly round for the object of his search, and strained his ear for another drowning cry, but all was dark and silent; the cries had quite ceased. His strength too was beginning to fail, and he felt the necessity of gaining the shore while he had the power to do so. This was no easy matter, the banks were steep and difficult of access, and he could neither find anything to grasp or succeed in gaining a footing.

At length he caught hold of a tuft of sedge or grass, and was raising himself with difficulty out of the water, when it gave way, and he was again precipitated into the surging stream—nor was it without great difficulty, exhausted as he was by his violent exertions, that he regained the surface, and endeavoured with strokes that were rapidly growing shorter and feebler, to keep himself afloat. A

few minutes more must have closed his life, but the current at this instant swept him under the boughs of an alder, which hung in the water, and which he seized convulsively. The grasp he had obtained afforded him secure hold, and a minute or two sufficed so far to recruit his forces, that he was able to drag himself out of the water and gain the bank, where he threw himself on the ground in a state of complete prostration, for the moment too weary to feel grateful for his own preservation, or to remember what had been the fate of his rival.

CHAPTER XI.

TRUCE.

Godfrey Thurston's horse got out of the river, and during the night found its way home, and in the morning, when the earliest of the grooms sauntered out yawning to his work, was found standing with his nose against the outer gate. His coat all flecked with mud and foam, his saddle drenched, and his trailing bridle, told a tale of disaster, and the groom hastened back to the house and alarmed the family. Mr. Carslope was, for

once, thoroughly aroused, and he and Antony Wyvil, and every servant the house contained, explored the neighbouring fields and the road to Marchbury, but without success. They learned indeed that he had left the market town late the previous afternoon, and found he had passed through a toll-gate half way on the road, but more they could not learn, until many hours later, when Mr. Carslope returned home despondingly from his ineffectual quest, and was met at his own gate by the tidings that his nephew's body had been picked up some miles further down the stream, and that they were even then bringing it home.

Mr. Carslope was fairly overwhelmed by the suddenness of the shock. He went to his room, and shut himself up in it for that and the following day, a prey to listless grief. He had really loved his nephew with all the force of which his selfish nature was capable, had looked forward to his companionship for the rest of his life, and to his succeeding him

in the enjoyment of Wingbourne, and his death was as much a blow to him on account of the overturn of all his long observed domestic habits as to his more acute affections. He sat with his face buried in his hands, desisting even from his long-accustomed pipe, and answered testily to all who came to him for advice or orders.

"Go to Mr. Wyvil. He is the best person to ask. Go to him, I say; I'm not able to attend to any of these matters."

On Antony therefore devolved the superintendence and the multifarious duties incident to so sudden and momentous an event, which of right belonged to the master of the house to perform. He had to summon the coroner, to write letters to the numerous relations of the Thurston family, and to make all other necessary arrangements. In these he was actively assisted both by the old majordomo Nichols, and by Mr. Joy, whose better qualities began to shine out in the midst of trouble, and whose real kind-heartedness out-

weighed for the time his timidity and dread of incurring responsibility. It was true that when endeavouring to comfort Mr. Carslope for his nephew's loss, he found nothing more original or less trite to say than that "Blessed were they who died in the Lord," a remark not appropriate in any way to poor Godfrey Thurston, but though Mr. Carslope shook his head and would not listen to him, Antony found his material services of great use.

There were sufficient witnesses to prove in what condition Godfrey had left Marchbury, to make the manner of his death, swollen as the river was that night, a matter of no doubt; had there been any, Ellerslie's evidence was so clearly and circumstantially given, that it must have removed it. He had made his appearance at the village inn in the middle of the night, some hours before the alarm was given at Wingbourne, but so wearied out in body or mind that he had not been able to give more than very general in-

formation of the accident ; and though a messenger was despatched to Wingbourne, he delayed to arrive there till after Mr. Carslope had left the house on the quest after his nephew in the morning. It was Ellerslie, however, who had directed the search to be made further down the river, and even accompanied the exploring party himself, though the body was found by others, and on the day of the inquest, he came along with the others to Wingbourne.

Mr. Carslope would not be present, but as soon as the tramp of the strange feet, and the echo of the opening and closing of doors, had died away, and the house had returned to its solemn hush, he sent for Wyvil and begged him to tell him what had been said. Antony complied, not at first perceiving in the dimness of the half-shuttered room that Florence was there also, on a low seat at the further side of the fire, her hands clasped on her knee, and her eyes fixed on her father's face

"So Ellerslie was there, too," said Mr. Carslope. "It's his turn now. He never liked Godfrey—never was fair to the poor lad. He did not show his satisfaction though, now, I suppose. Ellerslie could always put on a decent look, though he's far from sorry in his own heart, I could swear."

"On the contrary, sir; I believe you do Mr. Ellerslie injustice. I think no one who was present felt it so much. He appears very much cast down. If I did not know that it is only two days since I had seen him, I should say that he had had a month's illness since we last met. He seems very unhappy."

"I am glad to hear it," interrupted Mr. Carslope. "I shall think better of Ellerslie in future. It shows he has a more feeling heart than I gave him credit for. So you think he was really fond of poor Godfrey, after all?"

"I think, sir, he is sincerely shocked and grieved at his death."

"And well he may be," said Florence, and Antony, with a start, became first aware of her presence.

"He may well be shocked," she repeated, vehemently, "since he and no other was the cause of it."

"The cause of it?" exclaimed Wyvil. "True, but only as I or any other might have been the innocent cause. He did not interfere, but it would be cruel to call him the cause."

"He did more than not interfere," answered Florence; "it was his doing and no other's that my cousin went to Marchbury at all. Godfrey had promised me he would not go. I know he would not have gone had not Ellerslie persuaded him. He may well feel that he has sent him to his death," she added sadly.

"I was not aware of that," said Antony, "I did not know that Ellerslie had in any way influenced your cousin's going to Marchbury."

"Then of what interference did you speak when you said he was the innocent cause?"

"Go on, and tell us what he said, Antony," interrupted Mr. Carslope. "Has Ellerslie anything further to do with it; now I remember, I did hear that it was he who gave the first news of the disaster."

Wyvil continued: "Mr. Ellerslie deposes that as he was walking homewards on the road leading from Marchbury, and was about two hundred yards distant from the bridge, a horseman passed him; he did not recognise him, nor did he know that the rising of the river had made the plank bridge more dangerous than usual, and therefore said nothing to warn him. He had not gone much farther before he heard Godfrey's voice calling for help, and he hurried on, but it was then too late."

"But how was it he knew nothing of the state of the river?" said Florence, doubtfully. "He must have crossed it already that afternoon to get on the Marchbury road."

"So I asked him, but he said he had gone round through the village, and over the stone bridge on the coach road, and that he had not noticed the river—indeed, by all accounts, it had not risen so high then as it did afterwards, later in the evening. If he had known the height of the flood he should have thought it his duty, he said, to warn the traveller. When he recognised his cousin's voice, he threw himself into the river to his assistance, but the current proved too strong, and it was with difficulty he himself regained the shore alive."

"He did that?" said Florence. "I shall try to think more kindly of him."

"Ay, Ellerslie never lacked personal courage," added Mr. Carslope. "Is he still here, Antony? I think I should not mind seeing him."

"Had he known that, sir, I daresay he would have stayed. As it is, he left directly he could be spared. He told Mr. Joy he should be back for the funeral next week.

He seemed so unhappy, that in my opinion he is better away."

"Yes, and it's a long ride to Llanfydd—he did well not to wait till after dark," said Mr. Carslope. "I daresay he is sorry for having judged poor Godfrey unkindly now and then. Well, it will be a lesson to us all not to be so hasty."

Antony left the room and returned to Mr. Joy, the only stranger besides himself who still remained in the darkened and silenced house. For himself, though awed by the suddenness of the death, and sincerely grieved for the sorrow of the relations, he could not properly be called a mourner. His acquaintanceship with Godfrey had been too recent, and there had been too little community of feeling between them, for any esteem or regard to have sprung up. The only subject on which they did think alike had been one of rivalry, nor could Antony help recognising that in Thurston's death he had lost the chief obstacle to his winning Florence, an obstacle

which by any other means would have been well-nigh insurmountable. He could, therefore, feel nothing but a very tempered regret, and was, on that account, all the better qualified to encounter the multifarious duties which devolved on him through Mr. Carslope's incapacity, and Ellerslie's (the nearest relation) absence.

The day of the funeral came, and with it a number of connections, all on the Thurston side of the house. They were, without exception, a company of disreputable, fast men, who made even the present solemn occasion an excuse for conviviality. Mr. Carslope, whether from actual indisposition or an unwillingness to meet them, declared himself unable to leave his room, and the honours of the house, so far as they needed to be done to visitors who made themselves far more at home than he did, devolved upon Wyvil. His scruples about continuing his visit to the house in the time of mourning had, of necessity, faded away before Mr. Carslope's press-

ing requisitions, and Florence, though she could not but recognise that her father had too easily abdicated his office, had more than once expressed to Antony the obligation she felt to him for the trouble he had spared her father.

It was late on the afternoon of the funeral that Mr. Carslope said to his daughter,

"Flo', dear, call Nichols, and tell him to bring me some wine. I feel terribly overcome and fatigued; or stay—Nichols is most likely busy—there is wine set out in the breakfast room, I know. Go yourself and bring me some; mind which bottle it is. There will be nobody there at this time."

Florence went unwillingly, for she was averse to meeting any of their unwelcome guests, whose conduct on the present occasion had increased her dislike to them. Notwithstanding her father's assurance that the room would be empty she listened a moment at the door to assure herself that it was so, before entering. All was absolutely silent, and she

went in. There was, however, one man standing there, his arm resting on the mantelpiece; but he did not look round at her entrance, and she went to the table and filled her tray with the wine and glasses, hoping to escape unperceived.

He saw her, however, and as she was moving away turned towards her.

"Are not you even going to speak to me, Florence?" he said, sadly. "Have we quarrelled too much for that?"

Florence looked up at Ellerslie's face. It was pale, and looked worn with sorrow, and she felt touched at once. She put out her hand.

"I have no wish to make a quarrel with you, Ellerslie. They were none of my seeking when they came."

"And you do not hate me for what has passed?" he asked, retaining her hand.

"No, I forgive you; forgive you for trying to lead him astray, for, Ellerslie, that was the worst part of your dislike to him. You knew

what you were doing, and he did not; though you could not tell what would be the terrible consequences of his going to Marchbury that day."

"But you believe me to be guiltless of what happened afterwards?" he asked eagerly, and he waited for her answer in breathless interest.

"Surely," said Florence, surprised. "Guiltless? of course; because you did not know the height of the river. If you had, you could not have let any man, however much a stranger, try to cross it without warning him of the risk. Why, Ellerslie, of course I think you guiltless; had you known how the water had risen it would have been like murder."

She stopped an instant, and then looked questioningly at his face. It was as impenetrable as usual in its settled wretchedness; and she went on eagerly, fearing by his silence that she had pained him, though she did not know how.

"We might, anyone of us, have let him

pass in the same manner; but we should not all, Ellerslie, have risked our lives so nobly in the endeavour to save his."

"That was easy,". said Ellerslie, abruptly. "You understand nothing about it," and he turned away again to the mantelpiece.

Florence took up her tray of wine, and was about to leave the room, when he stopped her again, saying,

"And you forgive me for all that passed between us that afternoon? for my behaviour to you?"

"Certainly," said Florence, though she coloured deeply as she recollected Ellerslies' words then; but she added firmly, "when I forgave you for the way in which you used to speak of Godfrey, I should not remember anything on my own account. Will you not come and see my father?"

"Not now," said Ellerslie, hurriedly; "I am going back to Llanfydd; I'm best alone. If I can be of any use to you, write to me,

and I'll ride over; but if not I think I shall not trouble you for the next month or two," and so saying he left her.

Wyvil's duties were not yet over; for the next day, Mr. Carslope having given audience to a messenger from the farm, again summoned him.

"Sit down, Antony; misfortunes never come single," said Mr. Carslope, in a melancholy voice. "Here we have, thanks to you, just settled down again to stand face to face with our loss, when a fresh thing has happened to upset my poor brain; till I hardly know whether I am asleep or awake, or what is to become of us all."

"I trust nothing very serious has occurred, sir."

"You shall hear, and be the judge; next to what has already happened, or losing Flo' herself, I don't think that anything much worse could come. My bailiff, Wallis, has had a paralytic stroke this morning."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Antony, who at the mention of Florence's name had felt a load of apprehension.

"All? yes, and enough too. You don't seem to feel for me. You have no idea of what a valuable man he is to me. He has been the bailiff for more than twenty years. I don't know, in fact, what I shall do without him. I always fancy that I shall end at last with paralysis, or it may be apoplexy; my father died of apoplexy; he was a very good liver. But as I was saying, poor Wallis is a most valuable man, and you must see yourself, Antony, how impossible it will be to replace him during harvest time, and how utterly unfit I am for superintending the farm. I have not been able to do more than ride round occasionally for the last five years, and the late shock has proved completely too much for me."

"You may possibly find the exertion benefit your health," said Wyvil.

"I tell you I shall not," said his host, im-

patiently. "Exertion has always hurt me; I have always been the victim of trying to do too much. With my good will I don't stir one step more than I have been in the daily habit of doing. Godfrey, poor fellow, if he had lived would have been of the greatest service to me now; but I have one proposition to make, Antony, if you care to oblige me."

"Name it, sir. I shall have the greatest pleasure in serving you in anything."

"You are a good lad, Antony, and a kind one, and deserve everything that Flo' has said of you."

Wyvil would fain have inquired what she had said, but Mr. Carslope gave him no time.

"It is this. So long as Wallis is laid up and cannot stir, you shall go to him and take his directions and oversee the men for us, and carry matters with a high hand —within reason—you must be guided by us, Antony; young folks must take advice. But

if you will do this for me, just acting as go-between for Wallis and the men, it will be doing me a service I shall never forget, and make the time of your visit here pass profitably. It may even make you stay longer; I know young men like to be of consequence, and you can never stop at Wingbourne long enough to satisfy me, my young friend."

It need scarcely be said that after this flattering invitation Antony stayed, too glad of any pretext for prolonging his residence in Florence's home. Conscious that the present was not a time in which to urge his suit upon Mr. Carslope, or to hope to make any impression on Florence, he had been sadly looking forward to the necessity of leaving Wingbourne, not to return, perhaps, till after a long interval. It was no light task to be the assistant of Wallis, a cross old man, rendered still crosser by his present infirmities; and possessed with very little respect for Mr. Wyvil's acquirements, seeing that he was totally ignorant of farming affairs; but

to Antony it was rapture, for it formed the justification of his further stay at Wingbourne, and he applied himself to his task with a zeal and assiduity that soon won the respect of the men, and even the reluctant approbation of poor Wallis.

Florence, on her part, felt secretly gratified to her father for having provided so able an assistant and so pleasant a companion for himself; and day by day she acknowledged more reason to be glad of it. She had felt a true and tender affection for her cousin, but not enough, as her heart now and then confessed, to fit her for becoming his wife, and she was now conscious, in the midst of her sincere sorrow for him, of a species of relief that things were changed, and that her life was not destined to run on in its old groove. She blamed herself for hard-heartedness towards Godfrey, and tried to check the thought, but no amount of self-condemnation could alter the fact that she was happier because her poor cousin was no longer there to claim

her hand and her affection; and once or twice she found herself dwelling on what the difference in her feelings would have been, if Antony had been the one to cross the river on that fatal night; but she turned from this idea with a shudder.

Not a word of love was spoken on either side. Wyvil was as carefully guarded in his intercourse with her as ever, feeling it but due to the recent mourning of the family; and Florence, though she guessed pretty clearly the depth of her own feelings, and intuitively knew that he reciprocated them, had at times a shy reserve in her manner, arising from her memories of her cousin's still recent death, which was quite foreign to her former frank companionability. But, though no word of love was spoken, it could not escape any clear-sighted observer that it was from no absence of that quality.

There were two people in the house who did not view Mr. Wyvil's protracted stay with the same favourable eyes.

"A blind man could see what the young gentleman is stopping here for," remarked Mrs. Williams, the housekeeper, to her friend and coadjutor, Nichols; "but Mr. Carslope is blinder than the blind, and will know nothing about it till they ask him to give her away."

"He kens well eneugh," said Nichols, with some superiority and disdain at her want of observation. "It may be the master will like such a son-in-law, and what for no? He's a douce well-favoured lad eneugh, and unco' fond of the lassie."

"He may be fond of her," said the housekeeper; "but it's a poor tale that Miss Florence should marry out of the family, and Wingbourne go to strangers. I did think that since Mr. Godfrey's death she would have taken Mr. Ellerslie, mayhap, and the place come back to its old name."

"There's two sides to that," said Nichols. "Is Mr. Ellerslie willing; I'll no say to have the land; trust him for that, but to take the lady with it?"

"And if he's not," answered the housekeeper, "he'll be the first of his name as liked what ought to have been his to go to strangers."

"It might have been, it might have been," said Nichols, shaking his head; "and though Mr. Ellerslie's neither so fair spoken nor so weel favoured as this young chap, I'll not deny but I'd be glad to see him master of the place; and he'd have managed it better I doubt than this young fellow, who was not even born in England, they say. Not that that's his ain fault neither; but I'm thinking that Mr. Ellerslie has lost his chance by staying so long at Llanfydd, and if, without running against my duty, I could let him know what is going on while he's away, it would, maybe, bring him back again quicker than he went."

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIRST CHANGE IN THE CARDS.

Summer had glided into autumn, and November was closing with thick mists, round the lonely cottage on the hill, and Ellerslie still remained at Llanfydd; nor did he seem disposed to exchange his retirement for the once indispensable, if not congenial, sight of the faces of his fellow men.

The memory of the horror he had experienced on first hearing the drowning cries for help of his rival, had remained indelibly

impressed on his mind. The cold-hearted sophistry with which at the time he had endeavoured to persuade himself that it was Providence, and not he, who was suffering the poor youth to walk blindly to his death, had then and for ever abandoned him; and though shrinking from the remorse which such a conviction brought with it, he had tried to reason himself back into the belief, he was unable to regain it. He knew that he had had a man's life in his hands, and had deliberately cast it away.

During the long hours of the night, which he spent by the river's side, before he summoned resolution enough to go and spread the alarm at the village, he had ample opportunity to reflect on what he had done, and to consider what course was the best consulting his own reputation. It was true that had there been any number of witnesses of their meeting at the river side, no evidence could be adduced to show he had been guilty of his cousin's death; he was guilty by an act

of omission, and no one could tell the revengeful thoughts that had been locked up in his own breast, or prove that at the time he let Godfrey Thurston pass by him to the plank bridge, he knew that the crossing would prove impracticable to a man in his condition. But his dislike to young Thurston had long been surmised, and he now saw reason to congratulate himself on the exertions which, in his blinder and more generous impulses, he had made irreflectively. That he should have risked his own life to save Godfrey's, would silence all doubts that the two kinsmen had not parted friends. His own state of exhaustion, his dress heavy with wet, his "looks downcast and damp," and the exactitude with which he described the scene and circumstances, all confirmed his tale as every tittle true. No one doubted that it could be other than what he said; and Florence's simple and wholly unpremeditated words, "Had you known how the water had risen it would have been murder," had

been the only external comment made which tallied with his conscience. It startled and unnerved him; and it was no wonder that after that he needed the solitude of Llanfydd.

For the remembrance of his conduct at the river's side had this of painful in it: It was not the sudden impulse of unreasoning hatred, but the following out of the desire of years. It was true, that two minutes before he had no idea that fate would throw his rival into his power in such a manner; but all that evening he had been scheming his destruction, and not that evening alone, but through the latter halt of his life he had been his secret enemy, feeding his dislike with sneers, and secretly longing that chance or destiny would cut the gordian knot which his own hand was powerless to loose. Godfrey's ruin, though the work of a moment, had thus been the wish of many years;—his discontent, his cynicism, his restlessnes, had all reference to the fact that a rival lay

between him and Wingbourne; nor could he, now that the memory of this antagonism was painful to him, recall a single day when that wish had not been in his heart.

But these thoughts were extremely disagreeable, and Ellerslie's temperament led him to try to shun them as much as possible. He fixed his mind on Wingbourne, the prize on which he had set his soul for so many years, and which, now that it was so nearly in his grasp, appeared far less worthy to have been the dream of his life.

But, in proportion, as his value for Wingbourne decreased, his love for Florence for her own sake grew more intense. He no longer looked upon her as the heiress of a property which might have been his—a being whose removal was to be wished for; she was now the chief object of his ambition—the principal reward he proposed to himself for his schemes. If, when he first entertained the idea of marrying her, he had only looked upon her as a part of the appanage of Wing-

bourne, he made ample amends for the slight now; and had it been necessary, in order to win her, to resign all hope of her wealth, he would not have long hesitated. But Godfrey had been his successful rival in Florence's heart as well as in the estate, and, therefore, Ellerslie, through all his uncomfortable feelings, and though he would have given his right hand to have had no share in his cousin's death, never went the length of wishing him alive again.

Ellerslie would not have remained away from Wingbourne, could he have imagined the advantage his absence would give to Wyvil; but he believed the young Anglo-Indian to have left the country long since. Antony's departure had been fixed for the very day on which the body was found—it was natural that that event should have delayed it a few days; but Ellerslie had no idea that the three ensuing months had also been spent by him there. He had paid but little attention to Antony, never imagining that he

was in love with Florence in the short time in which he had known her, and he did not know how this time was indefinitely prolonged. There was no communication between Wingbourne and Llanfydd, and he heard nothing of his relative's affairs; and little imagining that there was a traitor in the camp, he thought his absence would give Florence leisure to recover from the first shock of grief, and smooth the way for his own success.

His original intention had been to wait for Christmas before he visited the Carslopes; but as the days went by, they began to hang more heavily on his hands, and his impatience to hear news of his relatives increased. There was no likelihood of his doing so, unless he wrote first or inquired in person, for Mr. Carslope rarely wrote a spontaneous letter to anyone, nor were the other inhabitants of Wingbourne more communicative. His surprise, therefore, equalled his gratification, when, through the heavy

mists and close drizzle of a November afternoon, he saw the old steward, Nichols, mounted on a stout Welsh pony, ride up to the farm house door.

"Nothing amiss at home, I hope?" he said, coming himself to the door to meet him.

"Nothing, nothing, I thank you kindly, sir," said the old servant, slowly dismounting. "Can one of your lads put the pony into a wee bit of shelter, poor thing, for it's an ill ride up to your house, Mr. Ellerslie, and I must be off early the morn, or the master will miss me. He let me go for this one night; but I gave Mrs. Williams very particular directions about the supper."

"And why have you come to see me?" said Ellerslie. "Take a chair near the fire, Nichols, and pull off your wet coat. You must have some reason for doing so, for a man of your years does not undertake a twenty-mile ride for pleasure only."

"And you'll not count the pleasure of

seeing you, Mr. Ellerslie, as warrant eneugh?" said the old steward; "though for that matter you're looking but moped, up here. We had been so long without hearing either good or bad from you, that I had grown uneasy. It would not do for all the old family to go off at once."

"Well, thank you for the interest implied," said Ellerslie, carelessly. "And tell me, how are you all getting on. How is your master?"

"So so-ish—I may say, sir. Well eneugh for a man of his years, though he's no that old either—not like me who have been fifty or sixty years in service, more or less, since the old gentleman, Mr. Ellerslie, took me, a white-headed younker, to answer the bells. But I'm stronger than Mr. Carslope yet; and while he can only ride out for an hour in the prime of the day, I can take my twenty-mile ride up here, and not feel more than a wee stiffish in the joints afterwards."

"Oh, you'll outlive us all, Nichols. And

Miss Carslope, has she recovered her spirits?"

"Ow, she's blithely," answered Nichols. "She has begun to sing again, and it's sweet to hear her bonny voice round the house once more; and she's riding round the country morn and evening, while the rain holds up, and the light lasts, and afterwards sometimes, for last night she came home an hour after sundown, and as dripping as a water-fowl. She had been lost in the hills, as you mind you once met her last July, Mr. Ellerslie, and they had galloped home nigh from the Hog's Back, she and Mr. Wyvil."

Ellerslie had hitherto been listening unconcernedly enough, while the old steward rambled on, but on the mention of Wyvil's name he looked up in astonishment.

"Mr. Wyvil? You do not mean to say, Nichols, that Mr. Wyvil is there still, after all this time has elapsed?"

"Oh, aye, but he is," answered Nichols, with the full consciousness that he had now

come to the important part of his communication, to which all the rest had been only the preamble. "Mr. Wyvil is still here, and is like to remain more than as long again. He rides here and he rides there, and the ploughboys and carters have to come to him for orders as if he was master of the house, and he will be master, too, it's plain to be seen, when Mr. Carslope dies, poor gentleman, for there's no one now can come between him and Miss Florence, and he will be real master of Wingbourne instead of playing at it as he does now."

"What do you mean?" repeated Ellerslie, his brow lowering with anger. "Are Mr. Wyvil and Miss Carslope engaged to be married?"

"No, they're not just that engaged—it's too soon, may be, after Mr. Godfrey's death; but anyone may see what they're coming to. He'll sit and look at her till the eyes seem fixed in his head, and watch for the words coming out of her lips, and there is not a

thing done on the farm as she would not like it. It was only the other day when old Blucher—you mind the old iron-grey horse, fell down in the shafts, and ought to have been knocked on the head, for he is na' fit for a stroke of work. Miss Florence did not wish it, and he is now in the stable taking the place of a better horse than himself. Mr. Wyvil wouldn't have a thing touched if she asked him not."

"Pshaw! those are things which every lady of Miss Carslope's rank has a right to expect," said Ellerslie. "Are these all the reasons you have for saying they will be engaged?"

"All the reasons? I trow not," said Nichols, "but there are things which ilka man may see with his own e'en which sound good for nothing when told. He's got books —new ones, from London for her, and she reads them night and morn when he's not to hand to talk about them, and they take rides together as I told you before, and he helped

her to gather in her flower seeds from the garden; and between them they've made the old gentleman take only half the drink he's accustomed to, though I see him often cast a longing look at the decanter—and he'd take it too, if he'd anyone to sit by and help him to enjoy his glass. And they,—but, in short, Mr. Ellerslie, you may take my word that they're as bonny a pair of lovers as you'll find betwixt here and Edinbro', and that you would have seen for yourself if you had been staying with your kindred instead of sulking here like a badger in his hole."

Ellerslie secretly cursed himself for his folly in suffering matters to continue so long without his supervision, but he said nothing, afraid to say too much. Nichols, who could keenly interpret the blaze of anger in his eyes, felt tolerably sure that the object of his mission, namely, to induce Ellerslie to return to Wingbourne, had not miscarried.

"I'm saying nought against the young gentleman, you'll mind that, sir. He is open

handed and liberal, and does not quarrel with the poor fellows for the matter of an odd sixpence or so in their Saturday e'en wage; and the servants have no fault to find with him, and are well enough contented that it should be as it is; and I don't wonder at Miss Florence either for thinking well of him, for he's a gentleman of the right sort—good-looking to the eye, and thinks all the world of her, though in that he's no better than Mr. Godfrey that was. But it's a sair thing to me that Miss Florence should make one that's not in the family, so to speak, master of Wingbourne, and he not even born in England, but in the Indies they tell me."

"Miss Carslope is at perfect liberty to please herself," said Ellerslie, harshly.

"I'm not saying no, sir. Young ladies are mostly, especially when they're rich and bonny like my young mistress; but to my mind she did better when she would have married Mr. Godfrey, for all there was no

liking between him and you, sir. Now you need not start, Mr. Ellerslie, there is often little kindness lost between near relations. Pity that Christian charity should be so scarce, but it's often hard to come by, and Mr. Godfrey liked you no better than you did him, for by that he was the younger and richer, and had not so much occasion for dislike But, poor fellow, he's the worst off now," continued the old steward with questionable orthodoxy; "but be that as it may, he was an Ellerslie in one half of his blood, and had a sort of right to Wingbourne, and Miss Florence might have done worse than to take him. But this gentleman that is neither fish nor fowl, neither of the family itself nor of any other that's known in these parts, is like to cut us all out and bring in his new ways."

"That's enough said for to-night, Nichols," interrupted Ellerslie. "I'm not in the humour for talking. Go and see what my cook

can find you for supper; you must be hungry after your long ride. Good night; I shall see you before you start in the morning."

The door closed upon Nichols inwardly chuckling at his success, and Ellerslie, as soon as he was alone, abandoned himself to rage and mortification.

This was the fruit of his long absence! He had imagined that she wanted time to recover from the grief of losing her cousin before she could open her heart to a fresh love, and, behold, she had already bound herself to another, and he had lost the golden opportunity by rashly keeping away so long. He could not doubt for one instant she loved Wyvil—every word Nichols had said confirmed it, and he raved at himself for a consummate fool not to have foreseen it all. He might have guessed that Wyvil would find some pretext to stay at Wingbourne and try to win her. He remembered now, with a thrill of wonder at his own forgetfulness, how marked was Antony's admiration for her during the

first week of his stay there, and he recalled that Mr. Carslope had once hinted that an honourable scruple to make her break her engagement, was possibly the only hindrance to a more decided declaration of his sentiments.

Of course Ellerslie vowed with vows bitter and strong that Antony should never have her; but how was it to be prevented? Not by any such means as he had plotted against Godfrey—he could not expect chance to be a second time favourable to him, and, besides, Ellerslie shrank from having a second life to answer for. He was resolved that Wyvil should be safe from all attempts of his. There were other means that he could use. Florence's heart might yet be his for the winning, and if love could not persuade her to change her mind, he had other arguments in his control which would make any filial tender-hearted girl yield.

"But it is not come to that yet!" muttered Ellerslie. "Why need I think of it?

Is it utterly impossible that she should love me for my own sake? I never tried to make any woman love me yet, but it ought not to be so difficult. I am her own relation, and could I but compel Antony Wyvil to leave the house for a while that I might have as fair a start as he has, I believe I could succeed. If the worst comes, and she already loves him past recall, I am still sure of her. But what would I not give that she should come to me of her own free will, and not from fear or filial duty. Not one hint of it till I see whether I cannot win her without! I must stay no longer here—to-morrow I must go to Wingbourne. I have lost too many days already;" and having come to this resolution, Ellerslie took up his farming account books, and busied himself for the next hour in squaring and balancing their columns, and doing other business in preparation for a somewhat lengthy absence from home. Then he took up his hat, and, indifferent to the blackness of the night and the all-penetrating

rain, he walked across the brow of the hill to the cottage where his foreman lived, to give him directions for the next week or two.

"If I am not back then I will write," he ended, "and let you have orders, and what further money you want. There is but little going on at this time of year. But if you want me suddenly you must send for me at Wingbourne—I am not going farther away this winter."

The next morning, however, as, in company with Nichols, Ellerslie rode down the hill, his self-confidence had largely deserted him, and he listened with but half an ear to the old man's garrulous talk. He was absorbed in his own schemes and his despondent forebodings. He was growing more keenly sensible to his personal disadvantages compared with Wyvil. Antony was nearly of Florence's own age; he possessed a gay buoyancy of temper, very like her own, and was besides handsome enough, if she had been an unreflecting girl, to win her heart for

that alone. Besides he had not had those past quarrels with Godfrey which had so deeply prejudiced Florence against her uncordial kinsman; and his friendly, uninterrupted intercourse with her for the last four months must have told terribly in his favour. Ellerslie's estimation of his own chances grew less and less flattering, as he thought of all these things; and, as his confidence waned, his mind reverted more to those secret schemes by which he meant, should all else fail, to gain his end. A sudden thought seemed to strike him. His brow, overclouded before, grew tenfold more gloomy, and he interrupted unceremoniously a long description Nichols was giving him of a project started by Florence, and seconded by Wyvil, to refurnish the old, handsome wing of the house.

"Ride on now alone, and tell them I shall be at Wingbourne in the course of the day. I have business at Marchbury, and this road to the right will take me there soonest," and spurring his horse he abandoned the aggrieved

majordomo, and did not draw bridle till after a rapid ride had taken him to the door of Mr. Carslope's lawyer's office in the Marchbury High Street.

Mr. Solly was engaged with other business, and though looking much gratified by Ellerslie's visit, which though not otherwise like an angel's, were few and far between, and curious to know the cause, he begged him to be seated till he had despatched it. Ellerslie complied, listening as he did so to the discourse which would not generally have interested him, pertaining only to some mining speculations, concerning which the client was asking his lawyer's advice before plunging in. But under present circumstances, the conversation coincided with his own thoughts, and as soon as the visitor took his leave, and the agent, with an obsequious and delighted bow, prepared to give him his full attention, he continued the subject.

"Do you generally advise your clients to embark in mining speculations, Mr. Solly ?"

"Not as a rule, sir; not in general mining speculations; but where there are good securities and it is tolerably safe, I do not discourage it. There is not a doubt that it is a very fascinating investment. This will be a very flourishing concern, I expect. The shares are almost all taken. I have done a little in that way myself; but I have no doubt you would be able to be accommodated, Mr. Ellerslie, if you felt inclined—"

"No thank you—not for me," said Ellerslie. "Do I remember rightly, that Mr. Carslope, a good many years ago, lost a great deal of money in some transactions of that sort?"

"Not through my advising, sir. Mr. Thurston, his brother-in-law, persuaded him to put his money into that," said the lawyer, eager to exculpate himself from the charge of false judgement.

"What was the precise amount of Mr. Carslope's losses?" asked Ellerslie, carelessly.

"You'll excuse me, I know, Mr. Ellerslie,

but I never talk of my client's affairs. I beg a thousand pardons, but I make it a rule. Without it there could be no confidence."

Ellerslie looked annoyed, but answered, "You are perfectly right. I asked out of very idle curiosity."

"And in what may I have the pleasure of being of service to you, sir, this morning?" asked the attorney. "Is there any little affair I can get done for you?"

"I believe," said Ellerslie, "my motive was chiefly to know what has been the news for the last three months. I have not been at Marchbury since that time, and have heard absolutely nothing."

Mr. Solly took up a ruler and began softly rubbing the table with it. He suspected that something else lay beneath this simple explanation. He believed that Ellerslie had come to ask his assistance in something, and was anxious to offer it with the greatest show of zeal compatible with securing at the same time the greatest amount of profit.

"You have not been to Wingbourne, then, I presume, since the mournful event?" he observed, after waiting a few minutes for Ellerslie to speak, in the hope he would solve the enigma.

"I have not. I am going there now."

"Some people have said—I hope you will excuse my mentioning so idle a report, Mr. Ellerslie, but you asked to hear the current news—that since poor Mr. Godfrey is out of the question, we mighthope to see you master there before long."

Ellerslie reflected rapidly. It was evident he could not obtain the information he wanted without enlisting Solly into his interests, and making him understand it would be worth his while to oblige him, if he had the chance of becoming a future wealthy proprietor, with the prospect of marriage settlements, title deeds, and other business to entrust to his man of business. It might, in such a case, be more to his interest to serve Ellerslie than to keep faith with his present client. His conclusions

were arrived at so speedily that there was no appearance of hesitation or delay before he answered, with a smile that implied even more than his words,

"The report is not quite so idle as they sometimes are, Mr. Solly."

"Allow me to wish you joy," said the gratified attorney. "Miss Carslope is an excellent young lady—your relative, too—nothing could be more appropriate; and the property, though, of course, I ought not to mention it in the same breath as the lady, is a very handsome one, and very improvable."

"That can only be a consideration to me from the prospect it gives me of being useful to my friends," said Ellerslie, "amongst which I can assure you, Mr. Solly, I count you not least."

To another man Ellerslie would not have spoken so broadly; but he said to himself that any delicacy of intimation would be wasted on Mr. Solly, who could swallow even a more open bribe without blushing. And

the result proved he was justified. The lawyer fully understood that in some way (he could not yet tell how) his co-operation was required to forward Ellerslie's marriage, and it should be made worth his while to do so. He listened respectfully for more, merely putting in the question,

"And how soon are we to wish you joy, sir?"

"We must wait a short time first," said Ellerslie, glancing at the crape band round his hat. "Indeed, I ought, in fairness, to tell you Mr. Solly, that Miss Carslope need not consider herself in any way bound as yet. There is nothing definitely settled."

"Oh, no; it is too soon yet," said the lawyer, quite understanding the disclaimer to be worth little more than a protest against haste; "but in another month or two?"

"And you may even have to offer your congratulations to another," pursued Ellerslie, "to Mr. Wyvil, the young London lawyer. Stranger things have happened."

Mr. Solly's countenance visibly fell. "I hope you have no authority, sir, for thinking such an event likely? Mr. Wyvil is quite a stranger in these parts. I do not think the news would give half so much satisfaction."

"And for that very reason, perhaps, the less said of the whole affair the better. I am sure I may depend upon you, Mr. Solly, for contradicting any report that Miss Carslope is engaged."

The lawyer bowed acquiescence, and again rubbed the ruler softly on the table. He was quite at fault. Ellerslie continued,

"Mr. Wyvil is studying for the law. You will probably see a good many changes come to pass. I am told (though I cannot vouch for the truth of it) that he has relations, solicitors in London, and that the Carslope estate business will be considered quite a nest-egg for them."

"So be taken out of my hands," soliloquised the agent, as Ellerslie paused. He was beginning to recover the scent. Ellerslie

meant him to see that it would be against his interest that Mr. Wyvil should marry the heiress, and he was expected to do or say something to hinder it. His visitor did not leave him long in doubt.

"Mr. Wyvil imagines it to be a larger estate than it is, I fancy."

"There is no fault to be found with the estate," said Mr. Solly, hesitating—he was feeling his ground now. "It's a fair property, though it was injured many years ago by paying off all the ready money to Mrs. Thurston; but it has well recovered it since. Mr. Carslope has not done all he might to it, but there are great capabilities for improvement, and there's money laid by, too."

"Belonging to Mr. Carslope?" asked Ellerslie, unconcernedly. The lawyer again looked doubtful. "You need have no hesitation in letting me know how his affairs stand," continued Ellerslie. "Our interests will probably be one in a few months. I respect your scruples, but here they are not binding.

Mr. Wyvil believes that Miss Carslope inherits some fortune from her father, as well as the Wingbourne estate in her own right. On the other hand, I believe that money to have been lost in the speculations alluded to before. I shall be much obliged if you will tell us which is correct. If Mr. Wyvil's views are, as I think, purely mercenary, it will make some difference to him."

"The murder is out," thought Mr. Solly. "This information is to be my first service. Well, I see but little harm in it. I have no objection to satisfy you, Mr. Ellerslie," he continued aloud. "Mr. Carslope's own property was never a very large one; but you are correct in supposing it was all sunk in those mines."

"Will you oblige me with the particulars?" said Ellerslie, quietly; and the agent having satisfied his accommodating conscience with the stipulation that the details were to go no further than Mr. Ellerslie, who, as he said, might already be considered Mr.

Carslope's *alter ego*, launched into full confidence concerning his client's affairs.

"Well, I am sure of one thing," said Ellerslie to himself, as an hour later he remounted his horse, and pursued the road to Wingbourne. "Carslope has no property to depend on beyond the estate; that gone, he and his daughter are beggars. I feared he might have some trifle remaining; but Thurston's improvidence and his own have secured me from that."

CHAPTER XIII.

FINESSING.

Ellerslie did not base his opinions entirely on the old steward's observations, nor from his own too hastily ; yet, during the next two days, he saw enough to convince him that Wyvil and Florence were fairly in love, and that his own arrival, if, indeed, there was yet time to win her heart, had been none too soon. Still he did not actually despair—he trusted that by removing Antony, were it only for the space of a few months, the favourable impres-

sion might have time to die out; that Florence would forget him, and the young man, immersed in the business and enjoyments of a London life, to him entirely new, would think no more of her.

Nothing in the friendly suavity of his manner led Antony to suspect the treacherous designs he nursed against his peace. Though Mr. Carslope would now and then have deferred to his opinion concerning the management of the estate, he declined all interference, made none but complimentary observations thereon, and seemed thoroughly to accept Wyvil's position as Mr. Carslope's right hand. But on the fourth day after his arrival, he sought that gentleman, and found him alone.

It was not Ellerslie's habit to use much circumlocution in talking to a man for whom he had so little respect as for Mr. Carslope, and in the present instance he went boldly to his point at once.

"Carslope, if you want a friend's opinion, you are doing unadvisedly to my mind in keep-

ing this young man in this half-way position between a guest and a hired servant. What are your intentions with regard to him?"

"Intentions? I haven't made any, Ellerslie."

"Things can't go on as they are for ever," said his uncompromising cousin. "This young man has got his own profession to follow. You have kept him away from it for four months without offering him any equivalent for the loss of his time."

"You would not have had me give him money, Ellerslie. A lad in his position?"

"Of course you cannot, and therefore you should have been even more careful. What he learns here will be of no use to him in his future life as a London barrister, nor help him on circuit, nor has he by his antecedents or education any of the sort of knowledge which would make him useful to you, I should imagine."

"Well enough," said Mr. Carslope, "and I have not trusted to him entirely. He has

done nothing but take my orders and transmit them to Wallis, and he really has made himself extremely useful. I have not the health to see after those things myself, Ellerslie, and you were away, and when Wallis was taken ill I had no one to trust to but him."

"Well, that necessity has gone by," said Ellerslie; "I am here, and should have come long ago had I known you were in want of help. You could have written to me any time. And now the matter stands, what do you mean to do with him?"

"I mean nothing," said Mr. Carslope, with peevish irritation, "I am not always forming plans as you are; there is no use in it, that I can see. Let things take their course. They will do as well for you and me as if we plagued our heads with them."

"Things must not take their course, Carslope—at least not without your being fully prepared for the consequences. What do you think will be the end of keeping Wyvil here? He is young and good-looking, and Florence

is little more than twenty, and has seen very few men in her life. Do you mean them to like each other and marry ? because, if you do, acknowledge it at once, and keep him not as your unpaid bailiff, but as your future son-in-law."

"Upon my word, Ellerslie, you are too hasty for me," said poor Mr. Carslope, "I have had no intention of the sort. I daresay it will be as you say, and they will in time like each other, but there is no need to forestall matters of that sort."

"But there is to foresee them," said Ellerslie, perseveringly, "enough at the very least to be sure of your own reply when Wyvil asks you for your daughter. Do you mean to give her to him?"

"I mean to let her follow her own inclinations this time," said Mr. Carslope, with the gleam of courage which Ellerslie's pitiless cross-examinations sometimes elicited. "I have had enough of controlling her and making her do my wish and not her own. If

Heaven had not willed it otherwise, she would have been Godfrey's wife by this time; that had to be, and I could not draw back, and you knew of it, Ellerslie, for years. And I told Antony not to think of her on that account, and like an honourable lad he obeyed me. But now she's free again, and may choose where she will and whom she will, and I shall not interfere except to give her my blessing, and see the estate fairly tied upon her as it was on her mother before her."

"But you have your preferences, of course, where her choice should alight," said Ellerslie.

"I wash my hands of it entirely, I tell you, cousin. I have no wish to influence her one way or another,—and now let's leave the subject."

"But you are influencing her, and the subject is not half finished," pursued Ellerslie, remorselessly indifferent to the Master of Wingbourne's evident anxiety to be rid of him. "If you allow Wyvil to stay here to the

utter exclusion of all other visitors, you are controlling your daughter's inclinations as much as if you forced her to marry him. Florence cannot be insensible, though you may be, to the consequences of seeing him every day."

"Well, then let her take him, for goodness sake! and I am content," and stooping down, he took the tongs up, and began to re-arrange the fire, making as much noise as possible in desperation at Ellerslie's persistency on a most unwelcome topic; but he could only delay, not put an end to it.

"Why not say at once you wish her to love him? It comes to the same thing."

"Because I have no wishes, I tell you, but that Florence should please herself. When I asked him to stay, I thought of nothing beyond the comfort of having a pleasant companion in the evenings, and an efficient help for Wallis; but if more comes of it, I have no objection."

"At last I understand you," said Ellerslie;

"you might have said this sooner. And now let me ask you whether you think he is as good a husband for your daughter, I mean with as good a fortune, as she has a right to expect?"

"I have no reason to think otherwise," said Mr. Carslope, once more with some complacency, for on this point he had no anticipation of being proved wrong.

"You had better be sure before you allow Florence to pledge herself beyond recall," said his censor, composedly. "Suppose that he really is all he seems to be. What have you, then after all? A young man—too young, indeed, to settle properly in life just yet—of no family that is known here and no connections among your neighbours where your daughter might naturally look for her friends, and his property is, though fair, not adequate to your daughter's expectations."

"He has more than you think, Ellerslie; his father died tolerably well off, and he had

the chief part of it. I have never exactly inquired, but—"

"But I have," interrupted Ellerslie, "and moreover I think it will be fortunate for him if there do not turn out to be some liabilities of his father's, which his fortune will be called upon to defray. I did not give the matter any consideration before, but if he is to be your son-in-law, it becomes important."

"It might be to others, but not to me," said Mr. Carslope, who, like a losing chess player, had been driven from square to square, and was now trying to entrench himself at the edge of the board. "I shall think none the worse of him, even if he has considerable losses. Florence has enough for both. Happiness does not consist in heaping up money, and I need give an account to nobody, who she marries or how many thousands he can settle on her."

"I will not say you are mistaken," said Ellerslie, "but your conduct is undergoing

far more scrutiny, and it may be, censure, than you are aware of. Everyone round about us is talking of how you are placing your house and daughter at the disposal of an unknown adventurer. I would not alarm you unnecessarily, Carslope, so I said nothing of this till now that you have told me you are determined she shall accept Wyvil."

"I never said that—I am not determined either way," exclaimed Mr. Carslope, but Ellerslie paid him no attention.

"I cannot think it right for my part that you should be left in ignorance of what people say concerning you. I saw Solly, your lawyer, a few days since. He talked of your affairs, of course. It is a general opinion that, although so long as your daughter married Godfrey it was all right, and the estate would remain in her hands unquestioned, yet, that if a stranger was preferred, there were doubtful points in her grandfather's will on which the heir-at-law might found a claim."

"Solly never told you that, Ellerslie!"

"I did not say that he did," said Ellerslie, coolly. "Of course, as your lawyer, he could hardly make such admissions. But people say what I have been telling you. Family matters will be discussed, you know, by those who take an interest in them."

"There is no one to take an interest in them except you, who are the heir-at-law."

"That is possible. You are more logical than I thought you."

"And what difference can it make in Florence's right to enjoy Wingbourne unquestioned, whether Godfrey is alive or not?" pursued Mr. Carslope, darting a reproachful glance at his kinsman. Ellerslie endured it with unruffled composure, bestowing on him in return a steady, scrutinising look before which the Master of Wingbourne moved uneasily in his chair.

"Nay, you know more about the nature of her rights than I do," said Ellerslie, after a pause; "I care for Florence and not her estate. But let us suppose this claim un-

founded, of which we spoke, and that all went well; that Wyvil only loses a part of his income, that he marries Florence, and gives up his profession to settle here. Is it, as far as you can judge, the kindest service you can do the youth to let their engagement and marriage occur so speedily? Is it the happiest position for a man to have no property but what his wife gives him, no profession but that of managing her estate, no consideration that is honestly won by himself?"

Mr. Carslope only fidgetted uncomfortably.

"I like the lad, Ellerslie," he said, at length. "I like him for his own sake as well as his father's; I wish to benefit him."

"I am sure you do, but not at your daughter's expense. I have hitherto only spoken of Wyvil, but what do you think will be Florence's feelings if in future years she believes she was hurried, persuaded into this marriage, by a man whose love for her is chiefly for her fortune."

"He is not mercenary, cousin; I'll lay my

life he loves her truly and honestly for herself, and would if she had not a farthing."

"Yes," said Ellerslie, smiling bitterly, 'you were very prompt to accuse me, who am your own wife's relation, of mercenary views, but you can give bail for a youth whom you never saw before a few months back. However, let that pass. For his sake as well as hers, and to try the sincerity of their liking before you hurry them into irrevocable vows, he ought to go to London for awhile to begin his studies."

Mr. Carslope looked unwilling, but he was not accustomed to withstand a cool persistent attack so long; and a very few more words sufficed to make him yield.

"Perhaps it is better he should go," he said, reluctantly. "What ought I to do?"

"This, nothing else. Tell him that you feel you ought not to have delayed him so long from his studies by what can prove of no service to him; that you think, great as the deprivation to yourself will be, you must

not ask him to stay longer. Say that you shall always feel great interest in his doings, and would like to hear occasionally from him, and if you want to gild the bitter pill, give him a prospective invitation for a month next summer."

"Of course I shall do that," said Mr. Carslope, plaintively; "but he will think it so strange from me. Could not *you* tell him this? You may use my name as freely as you like. I give you full liberty to say—"

"Not I," interrupted Ellerslie. "I am not master of the house. It must come from you."

Mr. Carslope sighed and said,

"Well, I'll do it some day; but he will feel it greatly."

"The sooner the better," said Ellerslie. "Tell him at once. He can then fix his own day for going. Here he comes; and, Carslope, remember one thing," and he laid his hand impressively on that gentleman's arm, and added in a suppressed voice, "if he asks

for permission to address Florence, tell him he must win a position for her, first; it will be an incentive to his studies," he added, with such an odd smile that Mr. Carslope felt more compunctious and sorry for Wyvil than before.

The door opened, but Ellerslie was standing by the window watching the driving scud, and the dead leaves, as they sped past on the November gusts; and Antony was all unsuspicious of his coming fate.

He had been out for some hours on the farm, and he now came in to give his report.

"I've been speaking to Wallis about that offer for the lambs, sir, and he advises you to take it. He says sixteen shillings is a fair price, taking the lot together, and that the winter promises to be a hard one; and they will cost you all the difference in keep if you put off selling them till the spring."

"I believe he is wrong," said Mr. Carslope, pettishly. "For my part I think it is going to be an open winter, and the stock might

very generally find themselves. What is your opinion, Antony?"

"I am hardly a judge," said Wyvil; "but I have heard you say very often that Wallis had a good eye for the weather."

"And so I may have done, and yet think him wrong now. Unless I could consult myself with my bailiff, how can I tell which is best? It is unfortunate for us all, Antony, that your father did not intend you for a farmer, and make you learn something to the purpose early. You are too old to take it up now properly."

"It does not seem to me so difficult, but that may be owing to my ignorance," said Wyvil, laughing. "I am afraid, however, you might easily have found a more efficient under-bailiff than I am."

"I think so, myself," said Mr. Carslope; and he looked imploringly at Ellerslie to induce him to come forward, and take on himself the unpleasant task of telling their guest he was no longer wanted, but Ellerslie's face

was turned resolutely away, and he gave no hope of attending to the signal. "You have done your best, your very best, Antony," continued the poor gentleman, "and I am much obliged to you for it; but I am not doing rightly by you, seeing that you are intended for the bar, in keeping you so long doing my business instead of your own. It is not as I would wish a son of mine to be treated in similar circumstances, and I owe it to your father not to stand in your way any longer."

Antony looked somewhat surprised, but answered that he had always intended taking a few months' holiday before settling to his reading, and he thought they could not be better employed than in being even of slight service to so kind a friend.

"There is reason in that—there is indeed," said Mr. Carslope with another petitioning glance at the immoveable figure in the window; "and you have been of service. I do not know what I should have done without you on that sad week in August, and I shall

be very sorry to lose you with my poor health, and Wallis still incapacitated . . "

"Then I am sure I have no desire to begin my studies at once," said Antony, eagerly. "I am perfectly master of my own time. My father only indicated the bar; but I am quite free to give as much or as little time to it as I like."

"That is not all, Antony," began Mr. Carslope, and then broke off. "Confound you, Ellerslie! can't you help me, and tell the boy what we have been talking of, and how it's to his advantage to leave us?"

Ellerslie, however much astonished at this open appeal, proved himself quite equal to the occasion.

"Mr. Carslope thinks," he said, without stirring from the window, but turning round so as to face his embarrassed and indignant listener, "that you, Mr. Wyvil, are, with the best intentions, wasting your time here. You have been his guest for more than four months, and your studies, of which farming

forms no part, lie idle the whilst. He is very much obliged to you for the help you have given him, but will have no further need of it, as I shall be staying with him till his bailiff has recovered; and he thinks that for the mere pleasure of your society he is not justified in detaining you."

"Say no more, sir," interrupted Wyvil, haughtily. "I am sorry I did not perceive sooner I was unwelcome. Had I guessed it, my own affairs would certainly have claimed my attention long ago. I shall not trouble you beyond a day further."

Ellerslie made no reply; he appeared to consider the matter as disposed of satisfactorily, but Mr. Carslope exclaimed eagerly,

"Now we have offended you! I feared we should, Antony. You must not believe that you are unwelcome. I am very grieved to advise you to go. It will be my own loss more than yours—I shall be so lonely. You must not take offence."

"I do not, sir," said Wyvil, though still

colouring with resentment; "I ought to have known that my visit was of an unconscionable length. That I did not, you must forgive me. You will remember that I had fixed my own departure early in August."

"And it was I who asked you to stay. I do remember—it was all my fault," pursued the penitent host. "But you must not consider this as any signal for parting. We must keep you till over Christmas; we must indeed, and then you must come to us early in the spring. What shall I do for a game of billiards without you?"

"Mr. Ellerslie will supply my place; I must not, indeed, intrude longer than one other day," said Wyvil. "But Mr. Carslope, as I may not have another opportunity of speaking to you, may I ask you to give me your attention now to something important I want to say."

"Certainly, of course. I shall be happy to do anything I can to oblige you," cried Mr. Carslope, eager to make amends for past

discourtesy. "Tell me at once what it is; I will do anything in my power."

"I should wish to be alone if you have no objection to come into the next room," said Wyvil, looking at Ellerslie.

"I will release you of my presence," said Ellerslie, coldly. "Is Florence in the the library, Carslope? I shall join her;" and passing his friend, he gave him such a look of admonitory import, that Mr. Carslope repeated uneasily,

"Anything in my power, I said, Antony. There are a good many things a man can't command, you know."

"This is quite in your power," said Antony; and as soon as the door closed behind Ellerslie, he told him without further preamble of his love for his daughter, and requested his permission to address her.

Mr. Carslope was in a softened mood, possibly weakened by the length of his wordy contest with Ellerslie, and impressions seldom lasted long on his mind, when the author of

them was absent. Besides he was anxious to make up to Wyvil for his recent unkindness; and in short, though he delayed and doubted and made faint objections to the proposal, he was not proof against Antony's insistant and earnest pleading; and he gave his consent at last in terms as cordial as though Ellerslie had not spent an hour in labouring to convince him that any consent would be impolitic.

"But I'll have no engagement, my boy," he concluded; "and I don't exactly authorise any correspondence except through me. I don't wish Florence to feel herself bound—a thousand things might occur. And if you would take my advice, which I suppose you will not, you wouldn't speak to her before you go, but leave it all to next spring. I am really sorry from my heart to have to take leave of you, but Ellerslie thought it was for the best."

"I know it, sir; I was sure that was Mr. Ellerslie's opinion," said Wyvil, now con-

firmed in his belief that Ellerslie was his rival with regard to Florence, and that his dismissal, for it could not be looked upon in any other light, was the effect of his representations. It made him all the more determined to have his decisive interview with Florence before he went, lest in his absence, unless their faith was mutually pledged, Ellerslie should win some advantage. Though he had as little reason to be doubtful of Florence's answer as the lover of any innocent, open-hearted girl, who had never learned and would have scorned to practice deceit, could be, yet he felt all the feverish uncertainty and trembling hope which a true, unassuming love brings with it. He was not confident in his own merits, did not think that his love could repay Florence for the lavish affection he should claim in return, and yet, in spite of his doubts, he did believe that he should succeed, and have the sweet consciousness of that love to sustain him through the impending interval of separation.

CHAPTER XIV.

ILL TIDINGS.

Wyvil resolved to speak to her that very night. He could not have long to wait for an opportunity; Mr. Carslope must be left that evening to the unrestrained enjoyment of his wine, in which Ellerslie must, out of politeness, keep him company, and he himself would steal away to Florence, and learn his fate before the others left the table.

But this plan was frustrated.

"Mr. Wyvil," said Ellerslie, as they met

at dinner, "I have to apologize to you for breaking the seal of a letter of yours. It came while you were out on your ride, and was taken up to my room, and I never looked at the direction till it was too late, and I saw the name inside."

"It does not signify at all," said Wyvil. "Where is the letter ?"

"I gave it to Nichols to take to you. I supposed he had placed it upon your table."

"I missed it then," said Antony, and Nichols went to fetch it for him.

Antony glanced at the letter. It was from a business correspondent of his father's, he knew by the handwriting, and he put it away in his pocket to read when he should be alone. Ellerslie, who had, in his unintentional opening of the letter, seen rather more than he cared to confess, glanced curiously at him to see how the contents affected him. He was aware that the news was unpleasant and that it might have serious consequences for the young man, and he had known this all the

time he was arguing with Mr. Carslope that afternoon, though he had touched on it but slightly. Unscrupulous as Ellerslie was as to the means he used or the assertions he made to gain his ends, he had too much of his old, gentlemanly feeling left to have pryed deliberately into another's correspondence. The mistake of opening the letter had been genuine, as he assured Wyvil, though once open his eye had glanced at it a moment longer than was necessary to discover the rightful superscription, and the recollection of this was more painful to him than all the misrepresentations he had made to Mr. Carslope and the agent.

Wyvil profited by his liberty from the dining-room to read his letter, instead of at once proceeding to join Florence. It was certainly unpleasant. His correspondent wrote him word that a firm in which a large portion of his father's property was invested was supposed to have overstrained their credit, and to be in a perilous position. The

news, he said, he trusted was not true, but if it were it would considerably affect the property of the late Mr. Wyvil. The large sum in the hands of the tottering firm had been assigned to Antony in the division of his father's estate, but his correspondent suggested that as the shaking firm might possibly have been insolvent for some considerable time, this arrangement ought to be revised, and the possible loss as attaching to the late Mr. Wyvil's estate, should, in equity, be equally shared between Antony and his sister. There was, he concluded, no good in calling the sum in, or pressing the firm too hard, as it might only accelerate their ruin, and if compelled to pay now, it would only be a few shillings in the pound, whereas the matter might afterwards be more satisfactorily arranged.

Antony read the letter with extreme concern. It was evident to him that the writer wrote in a more hopeful strain than the facts of the case warranted, and he could not

admit for one moment the suggestion that the loss to himself, individually, might be lightened by his sister's sharing it with him. Her portion had, unfairly, been less than his, and she was married to a comparatively poor man, and had already two or three children. The loss must be sustained by himself alone. He was a man, young, and with no claims upon him; but the news made the prosecution of his law studies, which he had hitherto considered optional, now imperative. This of itself was little, for Antony had never been of a disposition to shirk work; but there was a darker side still to this picture. With this evil impending over his prospects, he must leave Wingbourne without having his explanation with Florence; he could not, in honour, ask her for her heart when he did not know whether he should be a ruined man or not. He was ignorant that Mr. Carslope had already received a hint of possible losses, and had still been willing to accept him; and this cruel necessity of parting in silence from her

without knowing whether she loved him or not, was to him far more difficult to bear than the gloomy uncertainty which overhung his fortunes.

Could Ellerslie have foreseen how he would have acted on the receipt of the letter, he might have spared himself much of the trouble he had had in dismissing him; but he had not given Wyvil credit for the honourableness which was his due. Throughout that evening he watched both him and Florence attentively to discover whether any declaration had taken place; but Florence looked cheerful and unembarrassed, and Antony's preoccupied and somewhat dejected brow did not give the impression of one who had come to a good understanding with his mistress. Ellerslie, therefore, concluded all was safe, and exerted himself to be more than usually cordial, satisfied that he had fairly speeded the parting guest.

The parting the next day was not made easier to Wyvil by Mr. Carslope presenting

him with the beautiful bay hunter, which had once been poor Godfrey's especial favourite. The good gentleman said it was a sign of his unfailing esteem and attachment; but to Antony's over-wrought sensitiveness, it bore too much the air of a compensation offered for services performed; and in his depressed and irritable mood, he said to himself it was a useless and expensive present to a man about to live in London, who was not very sure he would have the wherewithal to support himself. But the offer was so urgently made that he could not refuse it, though an arrangement was finally entered into that the animal should be kept in the Wingbourne stables until its accommodation was prepared in town, whither it was then to proceed by easy stages under the care of one of Mr. Carslope's grooms.

This settled, Antony left Wingbourne, not to go at once to London, but to Caernarvon. He had heard from the lawyer he had met at Southampton, Mr. Crowe, that that gentle-

man was still staying in Wales, and remembered that he had mentioned being acquainted with one of the heads of the firm in which Wyvil's money was invested. He was, therefore, desirous of seeing Mr. Crowe, and consulting him on the probability of its weathering through its present misfortunes.

There were no signs of tears in Florence's bright eyes till he had absolutely disappeared beyond the sunk fence. She had heard, with grieved surprise, the night before, of his intended departure, but her father, who told her the news, hastened to add the comforting item that he would probably return in the spring, and on this her mind had dwelt for comfort, and she endured the actual parting with far more composure than Antony was master of.

"You will come again to us in the spring," she said, "and you must not quite forget us while you are away."

"Forget you!" exclaimed Wyvil, adding in a lower tone as he took her hand, "You

know, Florence, that I can never forget you while I have life."

"Flo', dear, the gig is waiting for Mr. Wyvil," called her father, and Antony dropped the little hand he held, after lifting it to his lips, and imprinting a hasty kiss upon it, which Florence's nerves thrilled to for an hour afterwards. She ran to the hall door and watched him drive off with glowing cheeks, for those few last words had been the first audible assurance of what had been dumbly in her consciousness for many weeks, and awakened a passionate response in her own heart. She looked after him till he was out of sight, and then dashing her hand across her eyes, turned away with a sigh to join her father, and saw Ellerslie looking fixedly at her.

There was no harshness, or even want of affection in his gaze, but it struck chilly on her, and made her feel far more than the actual driving off of the gig had done, that Antony was gone, and the dream of happiness which

had lasted so many days and weeks, was over. A sense of oppression, as of future evil, came over her as she passed him without speaking, and walked back into the house, which now seemed lonelier and emptier to her than it had ever seemed before. Her father saw that she was absent and depressed, and began talking of Wyvil, and his journey, and his future visit the next year; but this could not cheer her. She wanted solitude for awhile, and as soon as she saw he was beginning to doze, she walked to the library and tried to amuse herself with a book there. But the shelves had undergone a change, and numerous gay and modern bindings, ordered for her during the past autumn by Wyvil, reminded her of what Antony had been to her, and what he could no longer be for many a month to come; and in the first book she took down, the sight of the pages which he had read with her recalled his voice as vividly as if he were then standing beside her.

"Oh," she thought, "if the spring were but come." If he had only promised to write to her; but he said nothing of writing, and he looked so unhappy. He would be away for six long, dreary months—gone to London, where he would find so much to think of. Would he remember her and return to give her all the affection which those last words and the look which went with them promised, or would he forget her and leave her alone with only the memory of those few months' happiness?

She burst into bitter weeping as this possibility came before her, and laying down her head on the open book, abandoned herself to the grief it awakened, and to the tender memories of the hours of contentment they had spent together, which might never be repeated.

She was startled by a slight movement in the room, and raising her head saw Ellerslie. He was watching her with a troubled, dissatisfied expression.

"Are those tears a tribute to our departed guest, Florence?" he asked, in a voice which sounded to her ears harsh and dissonant, but which was only the expression of his own mortification.

"When did you come in? How you have startled me," exclaimed Florence, hastily brushing away the tears.

"I am sorry for that," he added, more gently; and sitting down beside her, he added, "I should wish never to startle you, Florence. Come, tell me, cousin,—you will let me call you cousin, will you not? It is a name you are used to."

"But for that reason, it ought to be reserved to the one whose right it used to be to call it me," she answered. "Godfrey was my only real cousin—you are none, Ellerslie. Call me Florence, as you always did when I was a child. I can remember the time when I used to take your hand, and go with you to see the horses, or ride on your shoulder into the fruit garden, and you let me pick as many

cherries as I could reach. That was before you used to live so very much by yourself at Llanfydd, and were oftener with us—whilst mamma was alive. I was quite a little thing, but you were a tall man then, Ellerslie, looking almost as old as you do now."

"I have not changed," said Ellerslie, who did not particularly relish her allusion to their disparity in age; "not changed, except in appreciation of you, Florence. I used to think you a trouble, and now—"

"And now," said Florence, playfully, "you would think me a trouble again, if I were to do anything to annoy you."

"I hope you will not try. I am more hasty-tempered than I like to think of sometimes," and the half smile with which Ellerslie had began to speak, faded away. For a minute he seemed pre-occupied, and then said, "Florence, tell me; were you thinking of Antony Wyvil when I came in?"

"I don't think you have any right to ask, Ellerslie."

"Yes I have, because I love you—love you so well that my only happiness is in seeing yours. Were you crying for him, Florence? You cannot deny it."

"Parting from friends is always a sad thing," said Florence, colouring with confusion and annoyance at having been found in tears. She rose, and the volume she had held in her lap fell to the ground. Ellerslie picked it up, recognised it as one he had seen in Wyvil's hands, and silently put it back on the book shelves.

"You think it sad," he resumed, "even though you think it is a parting for only a short time. What would you say or feel if I told you it is not likely he will ever return?"

Florence started, and looked eager and questioning.

"You know something about him," she cried. "You know why he went. You are keeping something from me."

"No, I am concealing nothing," said

Ellerslie; "I think he means to come back at present. I am sure he does, if he told you he would; but you do not know London, Florence. A young man must be either very firm or very poor to come out of it the same as he goes there. There are a thousand temptations to forgetfulness surrounding him, which in your quiet country life you can have no idea of."

"You do him injustice to think he is inconstant," said Florence, with spirit.

"You once told me, not so long ago, I did another one injustice" said Ellerslie, gravely. "Is it to be always my fate to have to tell you truth about those you love?" He paused; he had made the allusion to Godfrey purposely, for he meant if possible to awaken her past tenderness for her cousin, calculating that he should best fight the new love by reverting to the old. He was not afraid of a dead rival standing in his way.

Florence drooped her face upon her hands and made no answer, and he went on.

"Whatever else I thought of your cousin Godfrey, I never thought he was inconstant. I am sure he loved you to the full extent of his capabilities; but, my dear child, I do not think Wyvil does. I think it is a fancy he now feels for you, which will pass away with absence and temptation. His nature is not sufficiently developed to feel a real lasting love; you must look for that in an older man. He will forget you, and it will be fortunate for him that he does so; for, Florence, you will not remember him."

"How do you know so much of me?" said Florence, looking up with her cheeks dyed with blushes. "When I love once it will be for always."

"I hope so indeed," said Ellerslie, earnestly; "but I do not believe you have loved once yet. I do not think you really loved your cousin—not with the love of a wife. I am sure you do not love this Wyvil."

"How dare you say so to me!" cried Florence, springing up, the indignation she felt

quivering in her tone. "What right have you to speak in this way!"

"Because when you do love," continued Ellerslie, unheeding her anger, "it will be some one worthy of you—who can give you a love worth having in exchange—who can wait patiently and keep loving on, so that he be but sure of you at last. For such a one you were meant—not for any one inferior. Don't interrupt me. I will not press you for an answer now, but I will be heard. I am that one—I love you more than my life, Florence. I believe that you will return it, if you do not now. I am sure that you will be my wife sooner or later, when you have thought over and estimated what other fancies are worth."

"Ellerslie! be still. I will not hear it. I told you so before!" she interrupted him passionately, and he paused.

"I will give you time to think of it," he said, after a moment's silence. "I will not

speak to you of it till you have had time. I give you a week. No, not one word in reply; I cannot bear it. I will leave you now."

CHAPTER XV.

ON TRIAL.

Florence had been accustomed through the course of her young life, if not to a very intellectual, to a more devoted and submissive love than that with which Ellerslie now threatened her, and when he left her, she remained half-bewildered at his impetuosity, half indignant at the little deference he had paid her. Had it been any other than Ellerslie who had so spoken to her, anger would have been the predominant feeling; but

Ellerslie was a privileged person. He had always been regarded at Wingbourne as one, who, if not of different clay to themselves, was at least not amenable to the same rules, and his opinion had been law, and his wishes consulted, ever since she could remember. She had never been present during any of Ellerslie's contemptuous altercations with her father, but she had heard enough to know that Mr. Carslope held him in great deference and was even, for some unknown reason, a little afraid of him. But if this general respect for him tended to lessen her anger, her astonishment was only the greater. In this, as on a former occasion, the day of Godfrey's death, Ellerslie, the self-possessed, superior, though somewhat egotistical, elder cousin had completely changed; now imploring, now commanding, her whom until recently he had seemed to care very little about. Was it true, she wondered, that he did love her? If so, he showed it in a very different way to either Antony or Godfrey. Godfrey had never

gone into these transports of fury which almost frightened her, and Antony . . . but perhaps it was true that Antony did not love her. Ellerslie said he did not, and Ellerslie knew the world far more than she did; but yet he might be mistaken, and in the hope that he was, she recovered her composure, and effacing as far as possible all traces of her tears, went to join her father.

But though she would fain have forgotten Ellerslie's declaration of love, she found it impossible to do so. He kept his word, and did not again speak to her of it, but when he was with her, there was a tacit deference to her wishes, and a quiet observance of her which she had never noticed in him. He formerly sat abstracted for an hour over a newspaper, unconscious if she were in the same room, but now he never seemed to have his eye off her. She was conscious of an effort on his part to please her, to make himself amiable and her at ease, but yet she could not get over the impression that

whether she would or no, he considered her on a week's probation, and would call her to account on the stipulated day.

The constraint on her feelings became intolerable, and when, on the seventh day after Antony's departure, he entered the room where she was sitting, and approached her with the air of one ready for a long conference, she rose from her chair, and, too nervous to wait till he had spoken, said—

"I hope you are not coming to say those things over again, Ellerslie, for I do not want to listen to them."

"I gave you this week to consider on what I told you," was Ellerslie's answer. "Do you want me to repeat to you how much I love you, Florence? that you are the first—the only woman I have seen to care for, that you might make my happiness as surely as I will make yours, if you will trust me? Can you not give me some return? I don't ask for much, Florence," he added, hastily, as he saw her varying colour. "A year or two

hence you will feel it more. Only tell me now that you will in time learn to love me, that you may in future give your consent to our union, and I will be content."

"But I cannot say so, Ellerslie; I have always thought of you in such a different way. This is so new and strange. Since when have you wanted me to love you, or thought of marrying me?"

"Whether it be long or lately, I want it now, Florence, and shall wish it till I die. Don't you think, dear, you could learn to like me? Have I made myself too disagreeable to you and those you love better, in days long gone by?"

"Oh, it is not that—it is not that," said Florence, "but you don't know how you distress me. I like you; I will try to like you very much as a friend, but anything more I cannot! I have been miserable all this last week, since you first spoke to me. Does my father know what you want?"

"I have never made any secret of my

wishes. He leaves you quite free, he says. You have no opposition to fear from him. Consult your own heart, Florence"

"I do, and candidly, Ellerslie, I cannot learn to think of you in another light than as a friend. You make me afraid of you by urging me for more. It is all too sudden."

"You have had a whole week to consider of it," said Ellerslie, looking greatly disturbed. "I will not accept that answer as final, Florence. I must have one more to the purpose. I will leave you another week—a fortnight, dear, if you wish it,—to make up your mind in; but at the end of that time I must have a reply. I cannot believe it will be such an unfavourable one."

"Well, go now," said Florence, in restless excitement; "if you knew how unhappy you make me by talking as you do."

"In a fortnight, then," said Ellerslie, and placing himself at the table, he began to write a letter to his foreman, apprising him of

his continued absence; to all outward seeming, he was as calm and imperturbable as ever, but his hand trembled so much with agitation, that it was with difficulty he could form a line.

Florence sat down in her former seat, trying hard to keep back her tears; she felt more miserable than ever, in spite of the relief of having silenced him for the present.

"Unkind! ungenerous!" she repeated to herself, as she took up a book, while absolute silence reigned between them, till Mr. Carslope's entrance inaugurated the usual dribble of small talk, which was his most intellectual occupation.

As the days went by, and the first week, and then the second, passed on, and the fortnight drew towards its close, Florence heartily repented that she had not given Ellerslie so decisive a negative as must for ever close his pretensions. She felt more keenly than ever that she could never love

him. His fits of vehemence, alternated with an almost phlegmatic composure, perplexed and frightened her. She found there was something in him she could not understand, and she had at times a sort of terror that she was being slowly encompassed in toils which she could not see, but which would none the less surely bind her. His presence inspired her with dread and repugnance. She felt the exercise of some power over her, which she was at a loss to define, but which arose from the sort of security with which Ellerslie had spoken, as if the future was in his hands and not in hers. Restless and nervous, she now interpreted his very forbearance in not pressing his suit upon her at the time, into the effect of his firm confidence in the result of his wooing ; —a confidence, not elated like that of an arrogant coxcomb, who fancies his attractions must prove irresistible to a woman's heart, but partaking more of the nature of fate.

She shunned to meet his eye as the day drew

near, for when he was by, even the air seemed less free than of old. An undefined fear lay at her heart, and with it a more defined ache, for three weeks had gone by, and brought no letter from Antony. She knew it would not be likely that he should write to her, but he might have sent a few lines to her father, to show that he still remembered them.

"Perhaps," she thought, "the silence was the first effect of the forgetfulness Ellerslie had predicated," but she had not thought that it would have commenced so soon; it was strange if he had already forgotten the friendly circle he had been one of for four full months. She shed no tears; but the grief at her heart became all the deeper, when one day Mr. Carslope said,

"Antony does not write; I suppose he is in London by this time."

"Possibly still staying at Caernarvon. The Crowes are there, and I hear Mr. Crowe has two very amiable daughters," answered

Ellerslie. "Had you not better invite them also here for next spring, Carslope?"

He had the forbearance not to look at her as he spoke, or to notice the deep flush of pain his words excited. Mr. Carslope was the next who spoke,

"By the bye, Flo', what became of that young hawk which Godfrey, poor fellow, caught for you last summer? I saw the empty cage to-day, and that reminded me."

"I set him free, father, shortly after. It was dying, I thought, in the cage, so I let it go."

"I should not have thought you could have liked to part with your poor cousin's last gift," said her father, languidly.

"I can't bear to keep anything imprisoned," said Florence quickly. "If a thing wants to be free I must let it go, if it costs me my heart."

Her voice was very tremulous, and Ellerslie glanced quickly at her. She coloured as

she met his eyes, and he was for a while embarrassed. He could not mistake her meaning—she was longing for freedom as much as the imprisoned hawk.

When the last day of the fortnight came, Florence's dread of meeting him had increased to such an extent that she absented herself for many hours, wandering through the lanes and along the hill sides with no other companion than her old dog Syphax, who kept constantly by her side. Though greatly fatigued, she would not return till dusk, when she could slip in unperceived, and then, for fear he might be watching for her, she stole into the house by the kitchens, and went up to her own room. She remained there the whole evening, sending word by the house-keeper that she was too completely wearied out to join them.

The next day a cold, sharp rain kept her in-doors, and she dreaded once more that he should come and talk to her. She could not have given herself a satisfactory reason for

trying to elude him; the explanation must come sooner or later, and she could not hope to postpone it more than a day or two at the furthest. But the repugnance was stronger than her judgment, and she sought safety by her father's side, where Ellerslie could not introduce these painful topics. She read to Mr. Carslope, talked to him perseveringly, and filled his pipe assiduously. Once her efforts to amuse him seemed vain, and he appeared determinedly falling asleep; and rising softly she was about to leave the room, lest Ellerslie might take advantage of the opportunity, but her father re-opened his eyes, and called her back to entertain him again.

She came back, and all at once it struck her that her father's physical powers were certainly less than they had been during the summer. The last three weeks even had made a difference—he looked more shrunken, stooped more. He seldom now, even on a fine day, left his chair by the fire to encounter the chill of the outer air. He talked less,

dozed more, and now that Wyvil was no longer there to exercise a mild despotism over him, had relapsed more than ever into his old habits of deep drinking. His wine neither cheered nor inebriated him, but it seemed to be undermining his strength, and she felt remorseful as she thought of all this, that for so many days she had been absorbed only in her own concerns, and not in his well-being or amusement.

CHAPTER XVI.

"BY THE PALE MOONLIGHT."

When she left the dining-room that evening she remembered with a sudden fear that Ellerslie would probably take advantage of her father's prolonged self-indulgence to get speech of her, and she hastily resolved to spend the intervening hours till the house was still for the night, and all danger of meeting him over, in her own retired attic. She took a candle and her book, though her mind was too disturbed to allow of much profitable

reading, and opened the door which led to the old matted passage, through the disused part of the house, which was the way to the garret. Mounting the first flight of steps, she stopped to look out of the window. The rain had ceased for the time, though dark masses of clouds were surging up over the horizon of hills, their ragged edges torn by the gale into all fanciful shapes, and sweeping across the moon with a fury that rendered the occasional gleams of light only ghastly, by a contrast with the intervening darkness. The trees writhed their stripped branches in the gale, and the wind moaned in the old chimneys of the house, and waved the flame of her candle to and fro.

Suddenly, as she stood there, half depressed, half soothed by the wildness of the scene without, she heard a very different sound. The door at the further end of the matted passage opened and shut, and a footstep, which though light and hardly audible on the thick matting, had the firm tread of a man's thick-heeled

boot was heard below. Ellerslie was seeking her, and the panic she felt had nothing of reasoning in it—it was involuntary. Swift as thought, she fled noiselessly to the other end of the gallery, and tried to unfasten the door leading to the staircase of her garret. Once there, she could bolt herself in, and be freed from him for one evening, at least. But the door stuck fast, as it was wont to do in damp weather, and her hurried efforts to open it were fruitless. Her heart beat faster—he was coming on, and she had no power to escape. What he could say or do to hurt her she did not think,—her terror was at that moment unconquerable. His footsteps sounded on the staircase, and in an agony of dread she blew out her candle, and, drawing back as closely as possible into the darkest corner of the gallery, waited his approach in breathless suspense.

He was surprised to find it all dark. "Florence!" he called, at first softly, then louder, and meeting no reply began groping

his way to the further end, where the garret door was situated. But his eye got rapidly accustomed to the gloom, or else his ear was quick enough to catch her suppressed breathing, for he hesitated only a few moments, and then she felt his hand laid on her shoulder, as he said, in a low, grieved tone,

"Florence, my poor child, what have I done to make you so afraid of me?"

A half stifled sob was the only answer. He put his arm round her waist, and with gentle force drew her to the window, where the moon, having temporarily waded through the clouds, shed its light over her colourless face and quivering lips. Ellerslie regarded her for a few moments with surprise, and then said,

"You are anxious or frightened, one or the other. I did want to speak to you, but never mind that now. We can put it off to a better time."

"No," said Florence, with energy, and shrinking away from the light contact of his

hand, "I have put it off too long already. Ellerslie, you asked me to love you, but I cannot do it. I have thought it over, night and day, but the idea makes me wretched. I will always be an affectionate cousin, if you will let me; but if you ask for more I cannot give it."

"Florence, you are agitated; speak more calmly. You know, dear, I gave you plenty of time to learn to like me in. I will not hurry you now. You shake your head—do you think I should not be kind to you? Do not you know that I love you better than my life?—that your slightest wish is a law to me?"

"Oh! if it is," said Florence, with an imploring gesture, "do leave me, and never say a word more to me. I don't love you—I never shall. You said you would take my answer to-night. What can I say more to make you believe me? All idea of loving you makes me tremble, and I cannot think it will ever be otherwise."

"It will be otherwise, dear. Give me your promise, and I will be satisfied. I'll make you like me afterwards. You don't wish to drive me to despair?"

"No; but, Ellerslie, I do not love you—I never shall! I feel I shall hate you if you ask me any longer I am already afraid of you. Oh, you ought to go—you ought to be satisfied! I never wish to see you again—I shall never change my mind."

"You say this because you love Wyvil!" said Ellerslie, with a flash of his eye, which betokened his patience was at an end.

"I do not say it for that reason," cried Florence. "If I did, you would have no right to be angry. I am free to make my own choice. But I was not thinking of him when I said I could not love you, Ellerslie. I said the same when I had only known him three weeks."

"You did," said Ellerslie, with a slow and terrible emphasis on his words. "I have not

forgotten the day—it was the day your cousin died. You may remember, too, as your memory carries you back so far, that I swore you should never be the wife of another. I say more now. I was passionate then—now I am quite calm. You shall be mine. Florence, you may shrink back; you may look at me with anger and defiance, but I know it as surely as that we stand here—you and I, at this window."

"You know it!" repeated Florence, her indignation mastering completely all other emotion. "How dare you speak to me in this manner? You know I shall marry you! Who has given you the power to say I shall, whether I will or no? What scheme have you been nursing so long? Do you mean to force me to agree? Let me pass—I will go."

"No, you shall stay, Florence, and hear me," he cried, passionately.

"I will not, Ellerslie—I will go. All love, friendship, esteem is over for ever be-

tween us. I will hear no more. Let me pass! Let me go to my father! What! do you mean to keep me by force?"

"If by saying force," said Ellerslie, detaining her, however, with a firm hand, "you mean that I shall make you marry me by compulsion, or without your free consent, you are mistaken; the law would not bear me out in that. I claim nothing but what is mine, and woe to you and your father if you drive me to claim that. I mean to have your free consent. I hoped to have your love, but that, I see, is in vain. Had you cared for me, you would have spared me a very painful task, and yourself an unpleasant shock, which you now compel me to give."

He stopped, and Florence involuntarily clasped her hands in terror of what was coming. She made no further effort to leave him, and he on his part folded his arms and stood immoveable, the bright gleam in his eye alone showing his high excitement.

"You are a dutiful daughter, Florence,"

he said, at length, "and love your father. You would be sorry if any harm were to happen to him, I believe."

"Oh! what have you to tell me of my father?" she cried, in uncontrollable alarm. "He is ill; he has had a sudden —Oh! Ellerslie, why have you kept me here so long?"

"Stay a moment; he is perfectly well. It is not of his health I am going to speak. But if you feel such anxiety about every ailment of his, would you not, if you knew him to be in great danger, sacrifice, I do not say your life---that is never called for out of romances—but your dearest wishes to him?"

Florence eyed him steadily as she answered,

"My father has said more than once lately he has no wish to control my wishes."

"That is not the question. Your father is in danger, though as yet he knows nothing about it. I alone can save him, and that I will not do, except on one condition."

"You can save him; he is in danger!'

gasped Florence. "What sort of danger? What can you do ?'

"What would you say if I were to tell you it was the consequence of his own act? That the father you trusted so implicitly has committed a crime which would, if known, draw down upon him the heaviest consequences of disgrace and ruin?"

"Disgrace! Ruin!" repeated Florence, shivering with terror. "How do you know? What do you mean? I do not believe it."

"If you doubt my truth," said Ellerslie, "I will tell you nothing. You will then learn it at last, when it is too late."

"Go on then, oh, go on," she exclaimed. "Do you want to drive me mad? What has he done?"

"It would be useless to tell you the particulars. I can do so if you like, if it will be a gratification to you to know the full blackness of his guilt; but for the present you may feel assured that if it is discovered he will be compelled to leave Wingbourne, and

live an outcast and beggar for the rest of his life—if the law did not visit him with worse penalties."

"I do not believe it," cried poor Florence, in desperation. "You are inventing it to try and frighten me. My father, my dear kind father, never could have been guilty of a terrible crime."

"It was done before you were born," said Ellerslie, coldly; "but he will feel the consequences just as heavily as if it were yesterday. For aught I know he may have led a blameless life since. You do not believe he can have been guilty? Picture your father to yourself, Florence; I would not willingly pain you, but what, let me ask you, is the steadiness of principle in him which makes you think he would not do any crime if strongly tempted?"

"But what is the danger? Is it known? Oh, Ellerslie, you promised to save him. What can you do?

"I can hide the proofs of his crime. None

at present know the truth except myself and one other person. If I do not accuse your father, he is in no danger; and I will not accuse him, if you, Florence, will say the word, and promise to be my wife."

"Your wife!" said Florence, shrinking away from him with horror. "And you threaten to accuse him yourself; your own relation, your friend for so many years. Or you would make me the price of your forbearance. Ellerslie! can you be human to think of so monstrous a cruelty? He is in no danger but from you, and you mean to give him up?"

"I can, and I will," said Ellerslie, promptly, "unless you reward me for my silence. Forbearance! I have forborne for the last seven years to disclose his guilt, when I might have stamped him with infamy had such been my purpose."

"Seven years! and why tell it now if you have concealed it so long?"

"To win your acquiescence, Florence. Had you been willing to love me for my own sake you should never have heard so painful a story. But you would not; you could not give me credit for loving you as well as I do."

"Loving me!" said Florence, wildly. "Do you call this loving me, when you are ruining me and all I have of dearest? You have mistaken your course, Ellerslie. I have always feared you—I disliked you without knowing why; now I hate you. If you hoped to make me accept you by this threat, you have utterly failed. Do your worst upon us! I will never become your wife through fear."

She had drawn away from the window where he was standing, and was looking at him with a sort of frantic defiance in her eyes. Her unlooked-for opposition aroused all Ellerslie's combativenesss. He would be unyielding, too, and show no mercy if she resisted him.

"Very well, you have made your choice," he said, after a short pause, during which her quick breathing, and the moan of the wind outside had been the only sounds. "I shall leave you now, and to-morrow will see the blow struck that will drive your father away for ever from these walls, a pauper and an outcast, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing it is your doing."

He turned away to descend the stairs. Florence, in desperation, flung herself after him.

"Ellerslie! stay, have pity, have mercy on us! Oh, if you have, as you say, any love for me, do not kill me with thinking I am my father's ruin. Come back! oh, tell me you will not betray him, and I will do anything in my power."

"It is too late now. You had the choice given you."

"Oh! not too late for mercy, Ellerslie. Come back! I will be all you would have

me, if you will only spare him. I will try to love you—I will be your wife! Ellerslie, Ellerslie, do not go, on this cruel errand. Oh, show us some pity."

She had sunk on the floor as she made her passionate entreaty, and now clasped his knees convulsively. Ellerslie stooped, and lifted her up by main force.

"Are you in earnest?" he said, compelling her to turn her face towards his; it was convulsed with agony, and looked white as death in the moonlight which streamed through the window on to the dusty floor at their feet. "Do you make this promise truly, Florence? Will you, if I promise never to betray your father, swear to become my wife?"

"You say," she murmured, "that it is only through you he is in danger."

"Yes, I can silence the witness, as I have done already for many years. If you will fulfil your promise, I am able and willing to keep mine."

"I promise then," she said faintly, and he caught her in his arms, pressing passionate kisses on her forehead. He felt her shiver and tremble, but it was not for a minute or two that he discovered she had fainted. To restore her to her senses on the spot would have been impossible, and lifting her carefully and tenderly he carried her down the moonlit staircase, and along the matted gallery. A new and unwelcome feeling of remorse came over him as he saw her lifeless and marble face when once more in the lamplight in the hall, but he shook off the intruding tormentor, and summoning the housekeeper told her that her young mistress had been very much frightened in the garret. Mrs. Williams lamented and wondered, and between them they carried the poor girl up to her own room.

There, as soon as he saw symptoms of returning consciousness, Ellerslie left her in the charge of the housekeeper; and returning to

the dining-room, he found Mr. Carslope, who was in complete ignorance of the dismal scene which had so lately taken place, had fallen asleep over his wine.

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